

A F F I D A V I T
O F
J E N N I F E R M A T T A T A L L C O H E N

I, Jennifer Mattatall Cohen, affirm that the following statements are true and are firsthand knowledge to me, or based upon information and belief, as appropriate:

1) My name is Jennifer Mattatall Cohen and am the oldest daughter of Juan and Cindy Mattatall. I am 23 years old, born in 1974.

2) I lived in the Church Community in Island Pond, Vermont with my parents, Juan and Cindy Mattatall from the time I was two years old until I was almost eight. At this time, around 1982, my father left the Community because it was found that he had made sexual advances to more than one of the children there. This being absolutely unacceptable in our Community, he was confronted about it, but, not being willing to admit his transgressions or even confess that he needed help, he left, saying that he would return for us (his children) and he would destroy the Community however he could. Later, in Florida, he was charged with similar offenses against a young girl and he pled guilty to a reduced charge.

3) My father went to court in order to gain custody of us and take us from my mother, who remained in the Community at that time. In the course of his trying to get us back through the courts, my father told many lies about the Community and the people in the Community.¹

He went around the state of Vermont holding meetings, trying to defame the Community and gain public sympathy in his efforts to win custody of us. He publicly told many lies about what we do and what we believe. He generated much media attention and was largely responsible for stirring up a public hysteria that eventually led the state of Vermont to conduct an illegal raid in 1984 where the police seized 112 children because of fear of child abuse, but the Court found it a gross violation of the members' freedom of religion and constitutional protections. All the

¹In the press, our Community is often referred to as the "Northeast Kingdom Community Church" because Island Pond is located in a region of Vermont known as the "Northeast Kingdom." We customarily call ourselves the Church Community of the place where we are located, but we do not have a denominational title.

charges were dismissed for lack of evidence.

In his efforts, he associated with a group known as the Citizens' Freedom Foundation, which later grew into the Cult Awareness Network. (C.A.N.)² All of this he found necessary to gain custody of us, because my mother, due to her faith refused to leave the Community, not wanting to take us from the loving environment we had been raised in so far. She did not want to leave with my father.

4) The courts, despite clear evidence against my father, awarded him custody of the five of us in 1982, largely due to lies and misrepresentations he made against the Church Community with the help of the Citizens' Freedom Foundation, specifically a man named Galen Kelly. During the eight years that followed my brother and sisters and I spent four in various foster homes and children's homes, often not seeing each other or our Dad for a month or more at a time. Our life was very insecure.

5) Our father, for years did not allow us to have anything to do with my mother, not letting us receive mail or calls from her, telling us that she didn't love us enough to write or call. I know that she wrote us because after my father's death I was going through some of his things and came across a file of letters from my mother and different friends from the Community. I don't really know why he saved them. They never made it to us.

Twice during the time we were with him in Florida he let us have a very short, very supervised visit with our mother but this only because she was there and we begged him to let us see her. We all loved our mother very much and missed her, being very hurt by the lies we were told about her and the Church Community.

6) When I was 15 in April 1990 my father was shot dead by his own mother when she killed him and then herself to escape from "the grief

² The Cult Awareness Network is an anti-religious organization which has historically spread lies and misinformation about religions that they do not agree with. They have condoned violent deprogrammings, some of which have resulted in criminal convictions. C.A.N. went bankrupt in the summer of 1996 after losing a lawsuit involving one such deprogramming, in which the court awarded \$1,000,000. in punitive damages against C.A.N. See *attached Exhibit A*, a letter sent by the newly reconstituted C.A.N. to our Community in Vermont. The letter acknowledges the "earlier falsehoods" spread by the original C.A.N., describing it as "a hate group which gave out derogatory information on many, if not all, of the groups about which it received calls..."

that seemed destined to continue” due to his troubled life which “had been a non-stop series of problems with children and the law.” My mother came down and after social services searched it out my mother was awarded custody of all five of us.

7) I returned to the Church Community in Vermont at 16 only to find the caring, loving atmosphere I remembered and had always longed for growing up in the chaotic, instability and insecurity I experienced in my father’s custody in Florida. I chose to stay in the Vermont Church Community of my own free will and have now been back seven years. I am married and have three wonderful, healthy, happy children.

All of my siblings but one resides in a Church Community by their own choosing and the one is thinking about returning. Two of my sisters are in their twenties and married.

8) I know it to be true that in 1990 after 12 years battling truancy charges in the state of Vermont, all criminal charges were dropped after the Commissioner of Education himself visited our classes. I know that this man, Richard Mills, has written to the German officials on our behalf. He is presently Commissioner of Education in the State of New York.

Since 1990, the state of Vermont has recognized us to train our children at home. We welcome them for a visit and to meet our children, but we do not and cannot surrender control of their lives to the state. We acknowledge the authority of the state to know that are children are being educated and that they are safe.

9) I believe that if my father, Juan Mattatall, were alive today he would be grieved at the damage his lies have caused and possibly would have tried to make it right. It is hard for me to believe that the lies my father told 15 years ago are still being circulated today by unscrupulous men around the world. How can something so unreliable as news clippings be considered evidence of truth?

10) I want to say that after experiencing both living in the community and out that the children in the Community live a stable, secure life with many friends and much positive input. They know they are loved. We do not believe in or practice child abuse. Our children are our foremost priority. I now live in the Community with my husband and 3 children.□

Dated this 21 day of October, 1997, County of Greene,
State of New York.

Velyn Hotaling
Notary Public Date

Jennifer Mattatall Cohen
Jennifer Mattatall Cohen

VELYN HOTALING
Notary Public, State of New York
Qualified in Greene County
Commission Expires 11-14-98

Apostates and Their Role in the Construction of Grievance Claims Against the Northeast Kingdom/Messianic Communities

Susan J. Palmer

The Northeast Kingdom Community Church, on first acquaintance, bears a close resemblance to other Christian sects and revitalization movements emerging out of the Jesus People Revolution of the early 1970s. And yet it will stand out in the history of church-state relations as one of the first religions in the United States to be accused of collective child abuse, and to endure a mass raid on its children. Due to extensive media coverage, the main events of the controversial Island Pond raid are well-known.

On June 22, 1984, 90 Vermont state troopers arrived at dawn in their cruisers at the homes of the Northeast Kingdom Community in Island Pond, Vermont, armed with a court order and accompanied by 50 Social Rehabilitation Services workers. They searched the households and took 112 children into protective custody. The parents were allowed to accompany their children, and the families were bussed 20 miles to the courthouse in Newport. District Judge Mahady, after holding 40 individual detention hearings in one day, ruled that the search warrant issued by the state was unconstitutional. All the children were returned to their parents without being searched for signs of abuse, and the legal process ended abruptly. In spite of this auspicious victory, the Northeast Kingdom Community Church (henceforth referred to as the "Church" or the "Community") is currently besieged with custody disputes and continues to weather Social Services investigations.

In searching for the forces underlying this dramatic church-state confrontation, the researcher is faced with an apparently innocuous, not atypical communal and millenarian sect; the group adheres to fundamentalist Christian beliefs

and has never seriously challenged the laws or norms of society. They do not stockpile weapons, resort to aggressive evangelical strategies, use drugs, nor advocate sexual license. Their founder has made no extravagant claims to be the messiah, nor even a prophet. The group is not large, rapidly expanding, nor wealthy. Nevertheless, a study of their history demonstrates an extremely high level of conflict with society. Aside from a few minor complaints of truancy in the local schools, of practicing medicine without a license, and of neglecting to register births, the major grievance claims have always pointed to the discipline of their children, despite a paucity of evidence that members discipline their children any more frequently or severely than other Christian fundamentalists (Ellison and Sherkat 1993).

In responding to external pressure, the Church has exacerbated tensions with society by refusing to conform to mainstream child rearing methods, but it is important to understand the religious motivation behind its passive resistance. The Church manifests classic sectarian characteristics which serve to protect its budding culture from external assimilation and secular influences. On the one hand, elders encourage members to "render unto Caesar what is Caesar's" and to aim for a peaceful coexistence with society by following the guidelines laid out by American patriot Roger Williams, on the separation of church and state. On the other hand, they regard society as dominated by sin, due to its refusal to be "covered" by "Our Father." Parents in the Community have come out of the wilderness of sin and crossed over into the sacred realm to become the first generation of a New Order. Children play a vital role in their parents' eschatology. They are instrumental to realizing the utopian ideals and millenarian expectations of this fledgling religion. The elders interpret the Bible passage, "the sins of the fathers will be borne until the third or fourth generation" to mean that those living in the "body of the Messiah" (the commune) who avoid sin will be sanctified after three or four generations. Thus, they expect each generation to be less prone to sin than its parents; within the next 70 years they hope to be able to send out 144,000 pure virgin males to preach during the final ingathering of souls before the advent of Yahshua (Bozeman and Palmer forthcoming). In pursuit of their ideal of Restoration, they eat healthy food, wear modest dress, and cultivate selfless and loving relationships. Thus, it is essential to protect their children from secular influences that will necessarily undermine their utopian vision and cause them to "die" through sin. For this reason, when they resist cooperation with authorities, they are resisting demonic forces. When secular authorities seize or seek to control their children, they are attacking the deepest, most fundamental logic whereby this child-centered community defines itself. They are assaulting the Community's very spiritual identity and its most passionate religious aspirations—those invested in their children.

The aim of this study is to analyze the influence of apostates' testimonies on the trajectory of this sect's escalating church-state conflict. There appear to be three phases to the conflict between the Church and the oppositional coalition, which is composed of various interest groups that formed a network in a com-

mon mission to rescue the putatively abused children of the "cult." This coalition depended heavily upon ex-members' testimonials to provide the rationale for the moral campaign against the Church. Apostates—both witting and unwitting—exerted a strong influence on the ongoing battle which might be compared to a game of chess. The "moves" of apostates resemble those of the knight in a chess game, who is able to leap over the enemy line in zig-zag fashion and win new territories. There were various types of apostates, however, and their atrocity stories were used strategically during different phases of the "game." The Church's apostates can be classified as follows: (1) Activist Apostates; (2) Passive Apostates; and (3) Resurrected Apostates.

The three phases of conflict will be elaborated below, but first we will look at this new religious movement and its epic confrontation with the state over the custody of children—a confrontation that cast Vermont in the national spotlight.

THE HISTORY OF THE MESSIANIC COMMUNITIES

The Northeast Kingdom Community Church (now known as the Messianic Communities) was founded by Elbert Eugene Spriggs ("Yoneq") in 1972 in Chattanooga, Tennessee. Its roots are in the Jesus People Revival, and its belief system remains very close to Christian fundamentalism. The communities adopt the name of their local town; members are given Hebrew names and identify with the "lost and scattered tribes" of the Jews in diaspora and with the early Christian communities. By renouncing the world and sharing all things in common, members become part of the "body of the Messiah" and hope to avoid a physical death. They believe their church is the "pure and Spotless Bride" awaiting the advent of her Bridegroom, Jesus, whom they call by the name of Yahshua. Through increasing their ranks and "raising up a people"—defined as three generations—they prepare the way for the Jubilee horn that heralds Yahshua's return.

Communities now exist in Londrina, Brazil; Navarrenx, France; Sydney, Australia—but the majority of members live in New England. The Church numbers around 2,000, and roughly half are children. Children are home schooled, and television and fantasy toys are banned. The youth are integrated smoothly into daily chores and are dressed like the adults; girls wear long braids, long skirts, bloomers, and boys wear jeans, homemade shirts, and headbands.

The Church's guidelines for parental discipline stipulate that children who do not obey upon *first command* must be punished. The millenarian rationale behind this is that children must be alert and ready to respond to Yahshua's call. Chastisements must *not* be performed in anger, and usually consist of a few blows with a flexible reed, such as a balloon stick, on the palm of the hand. It must be the child's *own* parents who decide on and administer the punishment. The notion is that through discipline the child will achieve eternal *life*; otherwise they are "dying" into sin.

Phase One: The Origins of Conflict

In Chattanooga the group's first conflicts occurred at the grassroots level, mainly with worried parents of youthful converts, rival restaurateurs, and ministers of local congregations. These tensions drew the attention of the anti-cult movement to the sect. The first anti-cult organization, FREBECOG, was founded by Ted Patrick in 1972 in response to his son's attraction to the Children of God. As FREBECOG's bureaucracy expanded and it was superseded by the nationally based Citizen's Freedom Foundation (CFF), the concept of a "cult" and theories of "brainwashing" were developed, and information was collected on other new religious movements (NRMs). The Community in Chattanooga bore a superficial resemblance to the Children of God, since both were millenarian, evangelistic communes and emanated from the Jesus People movement. Both groups recruited middle-class youth from the counterculture who "forsook all for Jesus." Ted Patrick kidnapped eight of the Chattanooga Community's members between 1978 and 1980. Four deprogrammings were "successful," resulting in defections, but four members returned to the group. Three of the defectors assisted in future deprogrammings.

During the Chattanooga phase, the "cult-labeling" process focused on the founder, Elbert Eugene Spriggs. He was condemned as a self-proclaimed "Apostle" who exerted "total control" over his followers and molded them into religious fanatics who held themselves above the law. He was said to employ "mind-control" techniques to enlist his followers in communal and voluntary labor that undercut local businesses (Beverly n.d.). Spriggs has often been described as a former "carnival barker"—a colorful term that conjures up images of the American frontier snake-oil salesman, the charming charlatan with a fast patter. In fact, Spriggs was by profession a high school teacher and fairly successful travel agent/tour guide who worked for one day in a carnival, but not as a barker.

During this phase, the Community's reaction was defensive. They withdrew from the world, ignored the deprogrammers and negative press as much as possible, and relocated to Island Pond in 1979. In Vermont, media stories and grievance claims began to focus more narrowly on their methods of child rearing and discipline. Allegations of abuse first came to the attention of the authorities in 1982 in connection with custody battles involving three families: the Gregoires, the Alexanders, and the Mattatalls. In May 1983 the court awarded custody of the eleven children to the three fathers residing *outside* the community rather than allow the children to be "subjected to frequent and methodical physical abuse by adult members of the community, in the form of hours-long whippings with balloon sticks" (*Gregoire v. Gregoire*): Judge Mahady, who presided over the Gregoire case, expressed his opinion that the children were trapped in "some sort of holy war" (*Gregoire v. Gregoire*) between the parents. Out of one, the Mattatall case, the career of a formidable "arch-apostate" was launched.

Juan Mattatall was a Chilean hippie "head" and successful soft "dope dealer" in the 1970s counterculture. According to an elder's account, he had formed a band of hippies called the Lighthouse Family . . . [that] made and sold jewelry at crafts fairs across the country. He met the Community in 1976. His declared motive for joining was to cement his relationship with his 15-year-old girlfriend, Cindy, who lived with her mother and was expecting their second child. The elders approached Cindy, who first visited the Community and then joined. She and Juan reconciled and were married in the Community in 1976.

The elders described Juan as independent and unpredictable, but a valuable asset to Community life ("We loved the guy! He was very talented, charming—a real natural leader"). The trouble started when two little girls complained to their parents that he had made sexual advances toward them as they were sleeping. The elders confronted Mattatall with the allegation; when he denied it, he was ordered to leave. He went to Florida for a few weeks; upon his return he confessed to engaging in adulterous relations with many women. He was sent to live with the Community in Boston. According to an elder, "he was under a discipline and we worked with him, but he never did quite come clean. He confessed, but he always tried to rationalize it." His wife refused to take him back, and he blamed the Community for separating him from his family. He reportedly told Spriggs: "I will destroy the Community!" just before he left.

Mattatall filed for divorce and subsequently sought out Suzanne Cloutier, a nurse working for Social Rehabilitation Services (SRS) in Island Pond. Upon hearing his stories of abused children, Cloutier quickly became a formidable opponent of the Community. Mattatall also contacted Galen Kelly and Priscilla Coates of the CFF. With their support, he won custody of the five children in 1982. His youngest daughter Lydia, however, was overseas in France. Cindy Mattatall, pregnant with her fifth child, had allowed the childless Spriggs to take Lydia to live with them in France. Juan accused Spriggs of kidnapping Lydia, and Cindy appeared before Judge Mahady in a series of hearings. He repeatedly asked her if she could produce Lydia, and she replied in the negative. She skipped the last hearing and made secret arrangements to fly with her children to Europe. The CFF helped Juan track down her passport number, date of departure, and address. According to a Church elder's version of the story, "the New Jersey State Police, Juan, and some people from the anti-cult movement came in and held her at gunpoint in the middle of the night and took the kids away, even the baby who was nursing when they broke in" (Personal Communication).

Lydia was found in 1982 when the Spriggs returned to North America and arranged to meet Cindy in Nova Scotia. Suzanne Cloutier had already appeared in the area and delivered lectures on child-beating in cults. Canadian deprogrammers cooperated with the CFF in "staking out" the house in Cape Sable Island. The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, which arrived at the scene, followed the Community's cars as they left the house, and alerted the RCMP. Lydia was taken into custody at a roadblock and handed over to her father.

Juan Mattatall moved to Burlington, and a story appeared on the front page of the *Burlington Free Press* showing the triumphant father reunited with his five blonde, mop-haired kids. He hired a nanny and began attending a local church; from the pulpit he described the rescue of his kids from the "cult," and declared that his next step would be to save his wife. He brought the children to Island Pond to visit their mother on two occasions, after he received a court order. However, he arrived in a camper with CFF workers and parked right outside the Island Pond Maples household for the night. He handed out whistles to each of the kids and told them to blow the whistles when the abuse started so that they could be rescued.

Mattatall was soon in trouble again. The nanny he had hired in Burlington became concerned about his sexual activities with the little girl next door. Her complaint to the authorities launched an investigation. Juan then moved to Orlando, Florida and placed his children in the Baptist Christian Home, where they resided from 1982 to 1990. During this time he was reported to the Adam Walsh Center in Orlando for sexually abusing a local prepubescent girl, but he arranged a plea bargain to lesser offence and was placed on probation. The director of the Baptist orphanage, who had been warned that the mother was in a "dangerous cult," cooperated with Juan in blocking access to the children. Although Cindy had a court access order granting her permission to see her children, every time she travelled to Orlando she was turned away. She finally gave up visitation attempts and remarried, clinging to a hope that some day she might regain her children. In 1990 she learned that Juan had been shot dead by his own mother. This event was reported in the *Clark's Harbour, N.S. Guardian* (12 June 1990, p. 1).

A well-known defector from the Northeast Kingdom Community Church Juan Mattatall, 47, and his 74 year old mother, Maria Palmer were found May 7 . . . by his step-father, Bernard Palmer. Juan Mattatall charged that Albert [sic] Spriggs had sexually abused his daughter Lydia while he was her captor, but Juan himself later faced two charges of child sexual assault. . . . Palmer, . . . said . . . his stepson's life had been a non-stop series of problems with children and the law. He speculated that his wife foresaw that Juan's problems would continue and so she shot him to save him from the grief that seemed destined to continue.

Mattatall fits the model of the active, and activist, career apostate. Through his testimonies he defined the deviant aspects of the "cult" for its social audience. He started out as a "whistleblower" (literally handing out whistles to his children) and then sought out and brought together a coalition of disparate interest groups to support his custody case. Initially, he and the other early apostates were the "glue" that bonded the interest groups into one coalition. As the coalition gathered strength, the portrait of a Subversive group was constructed. However, grounds for legal intervention were lacking, a situation opponents attributed to the secretive and self-contained nature of the sect.

Apostates were invaluable, since they had crossed the line between the sect and society; they brought with them vital information that could be fashioned into "evidence" to rally law enforcement agencies against the "cult."

Wright (1995) traces the influence of different interest groups that formed alliances in order to lay grievance claims against David Koresh. A similar process began to take shape during Mattatall's court case when various interest groups responded to his initiative and began to form a network dedicated to the common cause of "saving the cult's children." The most important participants in the network were local businessmen, journalists, and anti-cult organizations. This network gradually constructed a portrait of a dangerous, child-abusing "cult" around the Northeast Kingdom Community Church. For each interest group it was expedient to participate in Mattatall's quest, although their concerns were quite varied. The network began to produce its own moral entrepreneurs, who soon became quite independent of Mattatall's initiative.

Local businessmen found their trade was suffering from competition with a communal organization based on volunteer labor. Countercultists found the elders' doctrinal innovations and Apostle Spriggs' charisma offensive. Social services personnel, who were assigned to protect children, were naturally suspicious of "cults" that made a policy of using corporal punishment to discipline their children. Suzanne Cloutier of Social Rehabilitation Services embarked on a personal crusade to "save the children." She referred to her home as a "safe house" and sought out defectors and invited them to stay with her. She taped their stories, kept files, and organized and dated everything she heard about the alleged abuse; she even invested around \$5,000 of her own money in "fighting the cult" (Harrison 1984).

Journalists, as always, were "in it for the story." During Mattatall's custody suit, journalists from the CBC and UPI had appeared in Island Pond and interviewed him in their camper. Some went on to recruit more defectors, taping angry testimonials and exchanging data with Suzanne Cloutier. The *Cult Observer* was frequently quoted in news reports warning worried relatives of "some 200 pages of affidavits [that] tell us of systematic, frequent, and lengthy beatings of children by parents and church elders with wooden and iron rods and paddles, often drawing blood . . . stripped naked and beaten for several hours" (Braithwaite 1984, p. 3).

In one of the most lurid portraits, "The Children and the Cult," journalist Barbara Grizutti Harrison (1984, p. 58) claimed "the cult is robbing children of their childhood," and compared the youth of Island Pond to the telekinetic, extraterrestrial children of the sci-fi film *Village of the Damned*. Invited by the Community to "come and stay for three days," Harrison was immediately on guard as "Three days is the standard period for what is variously known as 'brainwashing,' persuasive coercion or mind control" (1984, p. 62).¹

Several Vermont journalists assumed activist roles and were instrumental in bringing about the raid (Bilodeau 1994, p. 36). Sam Hemingway of *Burlington Free Press* admitted he "advocated for action in his columns and hoped the

coverage would bring results." Mike Donoghue of the *Burlington Free Press* claimed he had covered stories where he had "up to 18 subpoenas from lawyers for his notes." The most intrepid activist was Chris Braithwaite, editor of the *Vermont Chronicle*. He was approached by the Orleans County State's Attorney, Phil White, to look at Cloutier's files, and resolved to "get involved as a citizen." He covered the Mattatall custody case, interviewed defectors and outside relatives, and admits he "contributed information that aided in getting a warrant to seize the children." Even while the raid was in progress, Braithwaite (1983, p. 1) felt he was "objective enough to do the news analysis." He wrote an editorial on the aftermath of the raid entitled "Have We Lost Our Children?" In an interview he admits "on the emotional level I got very involved . . . I only know if I was in the same situation again, I would do the same damn thing!" (Braithwaite 1994, pp. 36-38).

The least visible but most influential organization in this network was the Citizen's Freedom Foundation, whose officials first visited Burlington in response to Mattatall's invitation. The CFF established a chapter in Orleans in November 1982; they collected funds, contacted the media, and appointed Galen Kelly, a deprogrammer, to aid members to "escape from the cult." Posters appeared on the streets of Island Pond warning residents: "The Northeast Kingdom Community Church Abducts Children." CFF meetings were held in Barton where townspeople were urged to stop buying the Community's bread, and store owners were pressured to stop stocking Community products. The night of the first meeting someone drove through Island Pond and shot bullets through the windows of the Common Sense Restaurant, the Maples household, and a gas station owned by the Community. This event was not reported in the newspapers nor investigated by the police.

Each of these agencies worked to protect the public's interest and operated within the logic of their calling. Once united, they were frustrated by the Church elders' refusal to cooperate and by the inaccessibility of the children. Influenced by the widespread concern about child abuse in our era, they accepted the likelihood of child abuse occurring in a "cult setting."

Phase Two: Escalating Conflict

The second phase of this church-state conflict is marked by an escalation in the conflict that culminated in the open confrontation of the raid. This was brought about through a moral campaign in which often passive or unwitting apostates were recruited and stage-managed. The deviance amplification process began to operate as Church elders began to suspect a conspiracy; their refusal to cooperate or compromise in some instances reinforced the public authorities' perception of them as deviant, evoking increased punitive action.

The coalition was highly organized and independent of Mattatall's leadership, and its leaders were waging their own moral campaigns. They began actively recruiting ex-members and tailoring their stories to win public support for their

common mission: to rescue the children. New defectors were encouraged to emulate Mattatall's model and reiterate the areas of deviance and discontent he had originally laid out. Some defectors, who were not particularly disgruntled, were coaxed and stage-managed to appear on the scene as ad hoc career apostates. Examples of these "stage-managed" apostates were Michael Taylor and Roland Church.

Michael Taylor had left the Community and lived for several months outside Island Pond before meeting Cloutier. She introduced him to deprogrammer Galen Kelly, who set up a meeting with SRS official Conrad Grimmis and a police detective, who recorded his testimony. Taylor was a single, childless member, unmotivated by custody concerns; he later complained to the press that he was cued to exaggerate the few chastisements he had witnessed. His tale appeared in a Vermont newspaper, but when he went to the news office and confessed that he had lied, the paper was not interested in printing his retraction. In 1988 he returned to live in the Community, but later defected once again.

Roland Church's grievance claim resulted in a court case that provided a strong rationale for the raid. Church was an Amish farrier from Maine who joined the Community with his wife and two daughters. However, because he was on the road much of the time plying his trade, the elders were dissatisfied with his community participation. In 1983 his twelve-year-old daughter, Daryl, got into trouble for encouraging younger children to play sexual games and the elders called Church to a seven-hour meeting urging him to discipline his daughter. According to a Community member, Church responded he was "so mad he was afraid he'd beat her like a horse." He therefore asked Elder Wiseman to do it for him. A week later Church left the Community and met Suzanne Cloutier on May 21. They contacted the Citizen's Freedom Foundation in Orleans, which recorded his complaint. Church charged Wiseman with simple assault of his daughter.²

On August 5, 1984, Roland Church recanted. He claimed to have been pressured to lie to the "news media" by Suzanne Cloutier (Harrison 1984, p. 6). "She called everyone in Vermont, I guess," he complained. "She's the instigator of it all." Cloutier, in turn, retorted: "I feel betrayed by Roland Church. It bugs me out. God forgive me, I almost pray a child dies. Nothing will happen until then—and they're all dying a slow death!" The case against Wiseman was held up in court and eventually dismissed in 1984.

The network then launched a search for more corroborating evidence. Priscilla Coates of CFF met with the Vermont attorney general's staff and provided names of defectors. SRS official Conrad Grimmis and Vermont State Police official Peter Johnson travelled around the country between 1982 and 1983, tracking down ex-members in seven different states to interview them for child abuse information. These interviews were used in the 18 affidavits that became the basis for the raid. One of these, the *Moran Affidavit*, featured the stories of fourteen defectors. Six of these individuals, all of whom had been deprogrammed by Galen Kelly, recounted stories that were remarkably similar. This

collection of atrocity tales was used to convince authorities that the group was subversive and a legitimate target for repressive action by the state.

Besides recruiting more apostates, the network directed its well-coordinated stigmatizing efforts toward several families inside the Community. Minor legal infractions blew up into major legal cases and personal tragedies were suspected of involving criminal intent; the Church soon again became embroiled in controversy. As the cases involving the Chambers and the Campbells demonstrate, the process of deviance amplification appeared to be operating in these escalating conflicts.

The first child of the Chambers couple was stillborn, and the local coroner agreed to issue the death certificate. However, when the coroner called the state attorney with a routine question, the latter immediately arrived at the scene and told the Chambers there would have to be an autopsy. According to one of the elders, Robert Chambers replied, "I refuse to have my daughter taken to Burlington to be mutilated." The sheriff was summoned, but Chambers refused to cooperate. While the sheriff was conferring privately with the coroner, Chambers picked up his dead child and drove to a field, dug a grave, and buried her. The state police sent two squad cars through the town in noisy, but unsuccessful pursuit. When Chambers returned home, he refused to reveal where he had buried the body. He was thereupon arrested and charged with transporting a body without a death certificate.

This conflict became a major media event. The "cult" was portrayed as a fly-by-night secret society that refused to register births or deaths and buried the bones of children in unmarked graves. In fact, members did apply for and receive death certificates on the rare occasions of a death. Nevertheless, this gothic legend soon took on a life of its own, as in Barbara Grizutti Harrison's article, "The Children and the Cult" (1984, p. 6):

They do not send their children to school, nor do they register births and deaths. Island Ponders feed off the persistent rumour that the cult has its own graveyard in which bones of children were found. Bodies of children were found; one baby was stillborn, another died, apparently, of spinal meningitis.

In 1983 another Island Pond couple, the Campbells, took their ten-month-old baby to a doctor who found hairline fractures in his wrists and ankles. Worried about rumors of abuse, he called the SRS and diagnosed the limbs as "broken by force." The parents then consulted a specialist in Newport who diagnosed a rare form of rickets and prescribed Vitamin B. The doctor's letter was sent to the SRS, but two weeks later the judge in St. Johnsbury District Court granted the state temporary custody. Troopers arrived at the Campbells' door and seized the baby on grounds of medical neglect. The baby was then examined by four doctors in a Burlington hospital who again diagnosed rickets ("Officials Tell Why . . ." *The Caledonian Report*, 22 June 1985, p. 12).

These cases offer clear examples of the deviance amplification process. It is

important to understand that their response was conditioned by the vulnerability of their religion, still in its chrysalis phase, and by the role of children in their eschatology. When Chambers, moved by the authority of his "lay conscience," resisted a perceived injustice, his action was interpreted as further proof of his innate deviance as a "cult member." While it appears the Community was clearly a victim of stigmatizing efforts, it is also clear that they met these challenges with a certain intransigence, and their refusal to compromise on matters of child rearing has tended to reinforce the deviance amplification processes.

The Island Pond Raid and Its Aftermath

By 1984 the network led by Cloutier, Braithwaite et al. created a portrait of a nefarious cult habitually cruel to children, but they were repeatedly frustrated in their intervention efforts. On four occasions they managed to obtain court approval to initiate temporary custody proceedings; but only once (in the Campbell case) was an order executed, and again no evidence was discovered. From their perspective the impediments lay in the inaccessibility of the commune, its "cultic secrecy," and in the *collective* nature of the alleged abuse. Laws on child abuse were designed to apply to *individual* criminal behavior, so as to avoid both the claim that abuse resulted from a child's environment and discrimination against working class families (Richardson 1993). Moreover, current laws are based on the assumption that claims can be readily investigated by interviewing the child's teacher, friends, family doctor, or neighbors—a situation not applicable to religious communes. As Harrison complained (1984, p. 61):

They've taken away all our normal ways to detect child abuse. There are no teachers to report scars, no doctors to report anything funny. . . . The children are moved from communal home to communal home. . . . What this amounts to is that nobody knows who is who, and it is this facelessness and anonymity that led to the Raid of June 22.

Met with passive resistance, the network was unable to gather evidence that would justify using force in its social control efforts on behalf of the children. This is where the grievance claims of apostates proved indispensable. Their atrocity tales provided ammunition to justify a legal intervention.

Three days before the raid, Attorney General John Easton summoned seven Community elders into court, took them before the judge one at a time without a lawyer, and asked them to name the children they lived with. Each man replied that his conscience would not allow him to reveal this information and was then jailed for contempt of court. Hours later, Judge Keyser, an 86-year-old retired Supreme Court Justice released the men, asserting that the court lacked authority to act unless the state produced specific names of people and specific evidence.

Frustrated by the failure of court actions and thwarted by Church elders' unwillingness to cooperate, a network that included the state's attorney general,

a social services commissioner, and a local newspaper editor took action. They met with Governor Richard A. Snelling and Attorney General John Easton in Montpelier and convinced them to approve their plan to take all the children of the sect into custody simultaneously so that they could be examined for signs of bruises. Cloutier's files and the police investigators' reports were turned over to Phil White, Orleans' County state attorney, who was sworn in as special assistant attorney general. Judge Wolchik issued a search warrant that was brought to Governor Snelling.

The input of the anti-cult movement was later revealed when Judge Mahady asked whether the acting prosecutor had authority in Essex County. The court was informed the attorney general's staff had met with "cult experts" Galen Kelly and Priscilla Coates of the CFP, who cited two cases of child-beating fatalities that had occurred in two other "cults," to justify emergency measures (Malcarne and Burchard 1992, p. 82).³ According to John O'Donnell, deputy human service secretary at the time, a pediatrician and social worker involved in the Michigan raid were called in for consultation. They compared that situation to the one in Island Pond, concluding that there was a significant potential danger to children at Island Pond.

The raid proved a baffling disappointment for the network intent on rescue, who blamed the decisions of Thomas L. Hayes, chief administrative judge for the Vermont courts, for its failure. On the evening before the raid, Hayes pulled Wolchik off the case and assigned Judge Frank Mahady to preside over the emergency hearings with himself and another judge as backup. Once the search warrant was served, state officials had to return to the court to show they had acted within their authority and to request permission to detain the children for another 72 hours. Deputy Attorney General Bristow and others complained that it was "unprecedented" to prevent Wolchik from reviewing the search warrant after it had been executed. Orleans' County attorney White also argued that Hayes wanted a judge who would reject the state's action, and deliberately chose Mahady who had a reputation for being a strong civil libertarian. The next day in court, Mahady reprimanded Judge Wolchik for signing the search warrant, and Wolchik later admitted at a 1986 confirmation hearing that he now regarded the information on which he had relied on granting the search warrant as unreliable and possibly false.

In his written report, Judge Mahady pronounced the raid "a grossly unlawful scheme" and commented that the state's motive was not the issue, for "even when the state acts in a noble cause, it must act lawfully." He criticized the language of the original search warrant as "more general in scope than any this court can find after careful research in the recorded literature. It may, indeed, set a modern record for generality." He accused state officials of rounding up children to find evidence they lacked; "What the state really sought was investigative detention."

Phase Three: Decentralization and Deescalation

Phase three is marked by a sudden decentralization and deescalation of conflict. Events subsequent to the Island Pond raid follow a pattern described by Richardson (Chapter 8 this volume) in cases of other NRMs brought to court on slender evidence. Once the case is heard in public legal proceedings, third parties are brought in, and members of the group (previously ignored by the media) are given a forum in court; a more realistic, rounded picture of the NRM emerges. All these factors bring some "checks and balances" to the situation and undermine the plausibility of the portrait of the group as Subversive. Moreover, the relative independence of the judiciary impedes future efforts of government agencies or the anti-cult movement to bring sanctions against a new religion (Chapter 8 this volume).

Within the Community, the Church elders abandoned their sectarian huddle and sought to deescalate the conflict through legitimate channels. Having experienced intimidating demonstrations of the power and hostility of the state in the raid and Dawson's FBI arrest—not to mention the tragedy in Waco in 1993—they began to reach out. They gained friends and supporters among members' parents and local officials, won concessions from the Vermont school board, and were interviewed by sympathetic journalists. The Island Pond Community organized a voluntary diaspora, sold most of their houses, and established small communal households across the New England states. The Church strove to maintain a more open and conciliatory stance toward the outside world.

For the oppositional coalition the abortive raid proved a major crisis, causing a rift between the law enforcement agencies and the social services personnel. To persevere in their mission, it was necessary to adopt a new oppositional strategy. Since the complexities of the case were too well-known in Island Pond, the battle arena was broadened and decentralized. Small-scale skirmishes are currently fought around the new households that begin to receive negative publicity in the local press once the local social services or (Canadian) Youth Protection agencies receive anti-cult literature, prompting fresh investigations and fueling custody disputes.

Tension remains, as in the 1994 investigation into the Community in Hyannis, Massachusetts that resulted in a hearing at the Barnstable County Courthouse on June 20, 1994. Ironically, among the young parents asked to identify their own babies were a couple who had themselves, as children, been taken into custody by SRS workers in the Island Pond raid of 1984. All cases were dismissed on November 4, 1994. During the same year, the Community in Rutland, Vermont was implicated in a custody dispute over four daughters, who were awarded to the father living *outside* the Community (even though it is quite unusual for the courts to award custody to fathers).

Apostates' testimonies still provide powerful artillery for these battles, although the tales are ten years old, heavily edited, and "resurrected." A close scrutiny of the affidavits submitted in recent court cases reveals how the law

material of ex-members is often padded, tailored, and recycled in order to bolster grievance claims. One recent defector, whose statements were used as evidence against the Community in Hyannis, later complained in an affidavit of the "underhanded operations" of the Department of Social Services. She claimed that the SRS sought her out in 1994, assured her they had substantial files on the Hyannis families, and promised that everything she said would be held in the strictest confidence, not to be used without her prior knowledge and permission. Later, she was upset to find her own name and her daughter's mentioned in an affidavit submitted in evidence; no other sources on the Hyannis Community were cited; and her statements were highly exaggerated. The Community's attorney quoted her as stating that "[The DSS] stated I had seen bruises and marks on the children but I had *never* seen them! I feel like I have been dragged on a fishing expedition!"

According to the Community's lawyer, Jean Swanko, the same affidavits that were used in the early 1980s (the Moran, Mattatall, Church, and Taylor affidavits) keep reappearing in affidavits of the mid-1990s. From a Community perspective (Johnson 1994, pp. 1-2) "repeatedly, law enforcement personnel fail to respect court rulings or documents in passing stale information on to other agencies." Further, the Community's attorney alleges that there is a recurring pattern whereby lawyers, who have been influenced by such information, study previous dismissed cases and decide they had been "handled wrong," and that they could "do it right this time."

As in all communal NRMs, custody disputes arise when one parent leaves the group. Recently, two fathers living in the Community chose to disappear with their children rather than trust the judicial system that has always awarded custody to the outside parent. Stories about the cult that abducts children have appeared in the news, largely due to the activism of apostate Laurie Johnson, who was briefly involved with the Community in Island Pond and has been searching for her two missing boys, Seth and Nathan, since they disappeared with their father, Steven Wooten, in 1989. Seth and Nathan's faces have appeared on *Child Find* and *Childseekers* posters distributed by the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children with the caption: "It is believed that the cult is assisting in the concealment of these and other children sought by custodial parents and authorities" (*Vermont Times*, November 19, 1991). Johnson also hired two private investigators from CRIB, an agency operating out of Philadelphia that specializes in ferreting out missing children. Community members complain that two scary men wearing cowboy gear (including guns) constantly invade their public dance celebrations by circling around on motorbikes peering at the children, and handing out cards to visitors bearing an insignia that closely resembles the FBI's. A search warrant was served on the Community in Winnipeg, Manitoba, in February 1996, and Laurie Johnson accompanied the police and social workers and scrutinized the children—to no avail. As of May 1997, however, Steven Wooten was arrested in Florida by the FBI, and the two boys

were given to their mother, who hired deprogrammer Rick Ross as an "exit counselor."⁴

The second alleged "abduction" occurred in Canada in the 1987 *Seymour v. Dawson* custody case. Edward Dawson joined the Community in 1986, leaving their 3-year-old son, Michael, with his mother, Judy Seymour. After several months, she signed a paper awarding custody to Dawson, who took Michael to live in the Myrtle Tree Farm Community in Nova Scotia. In August 1987, a police car and social workers drew up to the farm unannounced, and Michael was placed in his father's custody for 44 days. Social Services officials appealed the court's decision, and Dawson went to the Supreme Court in Nova Scotia while his case was ongoing in the local Family Court. According to Dawson's testimony, the Social Services agency placed an ad in the *Montreal Gazette* in October 1987 to locate the boy's mother. She was shown alarming testimonies of former members, which prompted her to sue for the custody of her son.

During the family court proceedings, Dawson made his son unavailable to the court. He was held in contempt of court and put in jail. After a presentation of belief in February 1988, the Supreme Court ordered his release and deemed him a fit father.

The case did not end with this decision, however. In 1992 Seymour and her lawyer arranged an ex parte hearing with the judge in Nova Scotia. The judge was receptive to a local deprogrammer's argument that the Community qualified as a "cult," granted Seymour interim liberal access for the weekend, and ordered Dawson to appear in court the following week. Dawson refused to allow Michael out of his sight, took him across the border, and lived for a year in a Church household in California.

Mattatall's old tales resurfaced when a Vermont state trooper sent a "Search for Lydia" news clip to California authorities, and RCMP officer Wendell Murchison (who had starred in a television documentary, *Missing Treasures*, dramatizing the search for Lydia Mattatall) wrote a letter recommending that abduction charges be laid against Dawson. Dawson was apprehended by the FBI in the spring of 1994, led out of the commune wearing chains, placed in a maximum security prison for three months, and charged with abduction and contempt of court. The abduction charge was dismissed in the 1995 trial, since custodial parents cannot abduct their own children, but Dawson is still waiting to appear for a retrial in the Supreme Court concerning the "contempt" charge. Michael is currently living with his mother who has de facto custody.

The child abduction theme was echoed in unfounded but persistent rumors surrounding the unsolved disappearance of Lyndon Fuller. The 24-year-old son of the wealthy Fuller Brush manufacturer escaped from a psychiatric ward in Berowick, Nova Scotia in 1991. Rumors circulated through the area that Fuller had joined the Myrtle Tree Farm Community, despite the fact that he had never shown any interest in its religion nor had contact with any of its members. The farm was searched and placed under surveillance for months; helicopters hov-

ered overhead and the Community's double-decker bus was searched on the highway. The case remains open and rumors still abound in Nova Scotia.⁵

CONCLUSION

In analyzing the effect of apostates' grievance claims on the Community, one can observe their use in three phases of the Church's conflict with the oppositional coalition. The first phase was actively launched by Mattatall, who brought the different agencies together and cemented their allegiance with abuse stories to further his custody suit. Defectors during the second phase played a more passive role. Sought out by CFF counselors, their anecdotes were solicited, selected, even distorted to accommodate the anti-cult theoretical framework and to produce a packet on the "cult" replete with shocking stories. Once these packets were delivered to SRS officials, a kind of circular logic ensued. New investigations would be launched; journalists would then interview CFF "cult experts," who would air their views on the "cult" as if they had just descended from their ivory tower where they "monitor such groups." The media would feed their corroborating stories back to police, judges, ministers, and doctors, creating the impression that the information was issuing from several different, independent, and mutually corroborating sources, thereby enhancing their credibility. Today these stories are widely dispersed, untraceable, and unverifiable; they have taken on a ghostly life of their own. While it is highly unlikely they will be used to construct another major church-state confrontation, their stigmatizing power has been directed into the narrow eddies of local newspapers, computer networks, anti-cult literature, and court records.

The Messianic Communities movement is now beginning its third generation; it continues to win allies and found new communes and it still evokes controversy. The raid represented a resounding victory for the Messianic Communities in a legal sense, and it won sympathy among civil libertarians for whom the Church became a test case. Paradoxically, however, it brought the Church an even greater notoriety, setting it back in its larger struggle for legitimacy. From the members' point of view, justice is not forthcoming. Mattatall is dead, his pederastic pursuits widely reported in the news; Church and Taylor have retracted; and deprogrammer Galen Kelly, who had conducted the interviews for the Moran Affidavit, is in jail. Moreover, the testimonies of the children themselves contradict these grievance claims. Of the eleven children awarded to their defector fathers in the early custody battles involving the Greigores, Mattatalls, and Alexanders, ten rejoined the Communities when they came of age. Nevertheless, these early, unreliable, and stigmatizing testimonies continue to be packaged, recycled, and widely dispersed. Several members have placed the Church in a vulnerable position by choosing to hide their children rather than submit to a judiciary that has consistently refused to award custody to parents *inside* the commune.

The earlier tales of the apostate who has ventured across the boundary of a

"cult" to rescue his/her abused children is now supplanted by a new suspenseful narrative, quite as frustrating for both sides as the rumors of collective child abuse, for the claim cannot be proven, disproven, nor resolved. This is the tale of children who disappear into the mysterious center of a communal society. While in both cases the fathers were the legal guardians at the time of the alleged custodial interference, they were sought out and arrested by the FBI and must now attempt to extricate themselves from the tenacious web of willful inaccuracies spun in the wake of Juan Mattatall.

NOTES

1. Harrison has since produced "Bad Faith" (1993), an article on the children of David Koresh.
2. While the severity of the discipline has never been established, it appears to have been grossly exaggerated in the court affidavit. The seven-hour meeting was reported as seven hours of actual whipping, and the testimony of "eight or nine" welts on her skin, read out by the judge with a heavy Maine accent, was transcribed as "eighty-nine" welts.
3. The two cases were the Stonegate Community in West Virginia and the House of Judah in Michigan. Neither group is connected historically, geographically, or ideologically to the Island Pond Community or to each other.
4. As of May 1997, Steven Wooten was arrested in Florida and the two boys, now 13 and 17, were given to their mother. She hired deprogrammer Rick Ross to counsel the boys for ten days, despite their expressed wish to the social worker to remain with their father. While Johnson has appeared on many talk shows, Wooten remains in jail for lack of the \$750,000 bail and faces a custodial interference charge.
5. In April 1997 a police investigation of the Community in Sus, France at "Tabitha's Place" was launched after the death of an infant with a congenital heart defect. The parents are facing charges of medical neglect leading to death, punishable by 30 years in prison. The media were quick to exploit the current fear of "les sectes" in the wake of the Solar Temple's mass suicides. Relying on the countercult organization (ADFI) for their information, the media have printed highly erroneous descriptions of this "secte dangereuse," which may influence the nine-person jury if the case is not tried as a "delit" or misdemeanor.

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Chapter 10

The Role of Apostates in the North American Anticult Movement

Anson Shupe

"Apostate" is now a term used frequently when social scientists analyze defectors from new religious movements. The apostate role is understood to be one in which a person exits, either voluntarily or involuntarily, an unconventional or "new" religious group or movement (hereafter NRM) and then becomes an outspoken, visible critic of the latter. Moreover, such persons are understood to represent important resources for any countercult, anti-cult, or oppositional movement seeking to soil the identity of specific religious groups. For example, Shupe (1981, p. 214) states:

While opponents may suspect the worst of a group, they can only relate what they at best know secondhand. Apostates, however, can claim to have seen firsthand and often personally participated in various horrors. Their testimony is that of the insider and as such provides an apparently irrefutable confirmation for the propaganda [about] a group's opponents.

This chapter has two goals: to present a brief analysis of the development and re-interpretation of the concept of apostasy by modern social scientists; and to consider the evolution of the sociological role of apostates in the North American anti-cult movement (1971-1995) and their exposure by the mass media.

EVOLUTION OF THE CONCEPT OF APOSTASY

Chapter 2 of this volume approaches the entire cult-anti-cult struggle as one in which contested organizations (a category into which many new religious movements fit) possess relatively little power vis-à-vis social control agencies. This minority status lends defectors from such (largely) unpopular movements