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Children of light children of darkness: Inside and outside a religious commune

Guido Kathy Riley
The University of Montana

CHILDREN OF LIGHT, CHILDREN OF DARKNESS;

INSIDE AND OUTSIDE A RELIGIOUS COMMUNE

By

Guido Kathy Riley

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Approved by:

Katherine M Weist
Chair, Board of Examiners

Dean, Graduate School

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Children of Light, Children of Darkness; Inside and Outside a Religious Commune

Director: Dr. Katherine M. Weist KMW

Religious sects are closed, tightknit social groups whose constituents set themselves off from persons who do not share their beliefs. When the ideology of a given sect derives from a universalist religion (e.g. Christianity), this rigid separation from the secular world may conflict with the professed beliefs of adherents of the group. The sect which I refer to as the Children of Light Brotherhood is one in which this conflict arises. The purpose of this study was to discover the ways in which the Children of Light set themselves apart from the rest of society, and to describe the cultural mechanisms which allowed them to reconcile this separation with their religious beliefs.

The research took ten months to complete. The primary method of inquiry was participant observation. There was also some informal interviewing of persons associated with the group, both members and non-members. It was discovered that activities in almost every phase of life at the Brotherhood functioned to set the community off from the surrounding society. A number of cultural mechanisms helped reconcile the sectarian separation from the outside world with group ideology. In general, adherents of the Brotherhood were unaware of any conflict between the two, until confronted with it by an outside observer.

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Lastly, a note of thanks to the Children of Light themselves: despite our many differences of opinion, here's hoping that in our individual capacities we all serve the truth.

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INTRODUCTION

Sometime in the spring of 1981, a couple of articles appeared in a local newspaper about a modern alternative-lifestyle community. In the fall of that same year, when I was casting around for a thesis topic, I recalled those articles and thought the group might provide interesting research material. This study is concerned with the behaviors and interactions of members of that community, which I will refer to as the Children of Light Brotherhood. The group is a Judeo-Christian religious sect, and is both communal and communistic in nature. It is a very small sect, comprising no more than 150 members living in three different cities of the northwest. I estimate that the group has been in existence for fifteen to twenty years, though members are vague on this point and certain other aspects of their lives.

I began my research in October of 1981. Making first contact with the Brotherhood proved a little awkward, as I was not personally acquainted with any of the members. A man at the University Center who was familiar with the group relayed my request for permission to visit and observe the community; members seemed agreeable to this. I paid my first visit to the Brotherhood in late October, 1981. During the next ten months, I visited one of the open communal houses maintained by the

group about twenty times, each visit lasting from two to seven or more hours. At the end of that period, in August of 1982, I travelled to one of the communal houses in another city and lived with the Brotherhood for one week.

I was at all times honest about my intentions and the reasons for my visits; I was there in the capacity of a student of anthropology interested in religion, nothing else. Although I had respect for the ideology and lifestyle of the community, and even agreed with many of the views held by its constituents, at no time did I consider converting. Much of what I observed in the Brotherhood was very admirable, but residents also held many views with which I disagreed. At any rate, I felt that the only professional stance I could adopt as far as membership was concerned was that I had come to <u>see</u>, not <u>be</u>, one.

My efforts to be tolerant of and sympathetic towards a society different from my own, without letting myself be engulfed by it, were little appreciated by the Children of Light--in fact, they were seen as arrogant and standoffish by the group. My relationship with the Brotherhood was fine while I was merely visiting on a daily basis, but it degenerated rapidly when I went to live with the sect. I had intended to stay six weeks but ended up remaining only one. Although I got the data I had come for, the Children of Light and I parted on less than amiable terms, a situation I truly regret.

There are a plethora of theoretical approaches which could be considered when describing a group such as the Children of Light. In my study I focused upon one characteristic of the community which I found most interesting: the differences members made between those persons they perceived as belonging to the group and those seen as outsiders. In order to adequately describe and account for this dichotomy I relied upon the works of a number of different researchers, most notably Douglas' book Purity and Danger (1966), for a discussion of ambiguity, and those of Goffman on such matters as deference and demeanor, human interaction, and the presentation of self (1959; 1963; 1967; 1974).

Obviously no ethnographic description would be complete without some discussion of social organization; that of the Brotherhood is particularly noteworthy because of its seeming lack of structure. To account for this, I used Turner's works on antistructure (1969, 1974). Lastly, in any religious community ideology plays too big a part to be ignored. I found Wilson's books on sectarianism most helpful here (1970, 1982).

I acquired most of my information about the Brotherhood through participant observation; that is, during the first ten months or so I spent visiting the group I mostly observed activities without taking part in them, while during the time I spent as a resident I both watched and participated in the daily life of the community. My only other major sources of information were other outsiders who for various reasons had had extensive dealings with the Children of Light. These included persons who had lived in the community for varying periods of

time and then moved out, or such complete outsiders as the clergy of some established churches, and some ordinary persons who had no interaction with the Children of Light in any official capacity but were individually acquainted with some members.

The opinions expressed throughout this study are my own, unless specifically attributed to someone else. I felt that it would help the reader to better understand the difference made between insiders and outsiders of the Brotherhood if I were to describe in detail my personal experiences with the group, and the feelings which accompanied them; thus these ostensibly unprofessional editorial comments, in my opinion, add more to the study than they detract from it. They were spur of the moment reactions to situations in which I found myself, faithfully recorded in my notes during my period of observation. In no way should they be construed as either attempts at objectivity, or indicative of my general or current attitude towards the Brotherhood.

The name, Children of Light Brotherhood, is a pseudonym. As constituents of a minority in a somewhat hostile surrounding society, members are very concerned with maintaining privacy. I have used no actual personal names in this study, and have been deliberately vague about dates and locales, in order to insure that privacy.

CHAPTER I.

GENERAL DESCRIPTION

The Children of Light Brotherhood is an urban religious community. The ideology cannot be overemphasized. Members perceive themselves as pursuing the lifestyle and traditions of the early Christian Church. These patterns of behavior, they feel, were first distorted, then ultimately replaced by the more structured doctrines of St. Paul of Tarsus. The Children of Light believe in the Old Testament, the Gospels and other non-Paulist books of the New Testament, and the Nag Hammadi codices, non-canonical scriptures first discovered in Egypt in 1946. They reject all of Paul's teachings, which form the basis of belief in most of the more established Christian churches. Adherents of the group have their own interpretations of scripture, some of which appear radical to more traditional believers. For example, there is no marriage, (members' interpretation of the scriptural injunction to "live like the angels"), but a lot of procreation. Members have children, but neither acknowledge nor emphasize biological relationships, since all must behave like siblings under one Father. Children in the Brotherhood address their parents by their first names, and for the most part treat them no differently than they do other adults.

The Brotherhood has done its own translations of the Gospels and the Nag Hammadi codices, because its adherents feel that currently available translations are seriously flawed due to Pauline biases. The Children of Light consider themselves to be living in opposition to both secular society and all other religious affliations and movements, even those which to the outside observer would appear very similar. Most especially they disapprove of the doctrines of established churches. Members of the Brotherhood feel that their way is the best and perhaps the only way to salvation. In this they are similar to other sects (Wilson:1970).

Activites may vary somewhat in the different houses maintained by the Children of Light. In each city, members engage in a slightly different service to the outside world: providing a free lunch to all comers in a local public park, translating scripture, or visiting prisoners in the penitentiary, for example. Aside from these services, however, the general lifestyle is much the same in all residences. To the outsider it ususally appears to be very simple and tranquil.

Brotherhood houses contain little in the way of furniture or other material possessions. Aside from personal effects such as clothes and toothbrushes, members have few items of individual property; all else is held in common. The paucity of material possessions permits the Children of Light to keep their homes orderly with a minimum of effort. All of the Brotherhood houses I visited were very clean and uncluttered.

To the outside observer, members of the Brotherhood are likely to seem very similar to each other, perhaps even difficult to tell apart. There is a single style of dress common to all, males and females, adults and children, which is more or less that of the "hippie" counter-culture of the late 1960's. There is also a common social demeanor; the Children of Light are almost always quiet, soft spoken and genial. To the outsider they usually appear happy, well-adjusted, and easygoing.

On a typical day, residents of a communal house arise at dawn or soon after. Morning activities are usually oriented towards the group, and include housework, getting breakfast for the children, and helping handicapped or sick residents get dressed and washed. Most such chores are rotated among members. Afternoon activities are more individualized; helping the children with their school work (most youngsters living in the Brotherhood do not attend outside schools), reading or other leisure pursuits, or interacting with the outside community. Residents gather together once again for the evening meal, which is very much a social affair. After eating, most members remain together to talk or watch television until bedtime.

The group has two types of residences: open and closed. Open houses accept dinner and overnight guests, and are where outsiders are invited to visit when they first exhibit an interest in the Brotherhood. Closed residences exist for the benefit of members themselves. They are places where the Children of Light take vacations from dealing with the outside world. Children are usually born in closed houses, since less

activity goes on in them. Before I became a resident, all of my visits to the community were to open houses.

Although members of the Brotherhood view one another both as siblings and as equals, there are subtle differences in status among them. Some members, particularly those who have been with the group for a long period of time, have more authority than others, so that other residents will usually defer to their decisions. In this study, when I speak of a "high status" individual, I am referring to an individual who wields such authority. Persons of high status in the Brotherhood usually have more privileges than those with lower status, and often act as spokespersons for the group. In ten months of study, I never discovered exactly which factors determined the status of a resident. Length of time of residency and strength of commitment to the ideology (as manifested in behavior) both figured prominently here, but other determining factors seemed to vary among individuals.

The Children of Light do not work for wages. As they are quick to point out, neither did Jesus. Funds are obtained from various and sundry sources: donations, panhandling, the food stamps and social security benefits for which some members are eligible. Upon joining, many new members turn over their possessions to the group. I remember one man in particular, who upon joining allegedly turned over his bank account to the Brotherhood, about four thousand dollars in cash. Given such circumstances the Children of Light, although they have little in the way of material possessions, actually live quite comfortably, better than many of their neighbors. Their houses are large and may be very

expensive to rent--one that I visited even had a swimming pool. In each city there may be one or more communal cars. Health and dental care are available to all who need or desire them. In addition, high status individuals in the group can usually obtain funds for travel; many have been to Israel and/or Mexico for extended visits. In general, members of the Brotherhood seem to have much more leisure time than most outsiders.

This ostensibly carefree lifestyle is one reason why the Children of Light are often treated with suspicion and dislike by nonmembers. To neighbors who are struggling through the recession, they may be seen as lazy, as social parasites. The Children of Light are well aware of this hostility--I sometimes think they encourage it, or at least are not particularly upset by it. The Gospels state that those who are reviled and persecuted for their faith are blessed by the Father. In addition, being hated is in keeping with the nature of religious groups of this sort, a confirmation of protest against outside values.

Although members of the Brotherhood do not work for wages, it should not be assumed that they do no work at all. They keep their homes and yards immaculate and perform much of the repair work the residences require themselves; many landlords consider them model tenents. I know of one instance in which rent for a particular house was reduced, in part because of this. The Children of Light also put a great deal of effort and time into their own special projects, which differ from city to city: providing a daily free lunch to the needy, translating the scriptures, visiting prisoners in the penitentiary,

providing emergency assistance to whomever requests it. The Children of Light probably spend as many or even more hours a day in these activities as outsiders do working for wages. The real difference is that members of the Brotherhood do their work, as they see it, in service to God and humanity, thus no material remuneration can be accepted for it. They do not view themselves as sponging off of society, not even when panhandling, because all things are ultimately the Father's to give out or withhold. When I was conducting this study I used to wonder how these people could ask perfect strangers for money or other types of donations, especially for sums of money which would be used to purchase nonessentials, without evincing the slightest shame or embarassment. Apparently the Children of Light never felt awkward making these requests because in their eyes the persons asked did not really own the money or other items in the first place.

Permanent residents are usually reluctant to discuss what went on in their lives prior to the time when they moved in with the Brotherhood. From what little information I could gather, it seems that most persons associated with the group had typical American middle class upbringings, but went on to spend some part of their early adulthood years in counter-culture activities, such as the anti-war movement of the late 1960's and early 1970's. The reluctance to talk about earlier lifestyles seems to be connected with current commitment to the Brotherhood; what came before is unimportant. Those members who could be persuaded to talk about their life histories invariably hinted that they had had a number of disagreeable experiences in the "real world"

which were at least partly responsible for their later joining the Brotherhood.

PART I

OUTSIDE THE GROUP

CHAPTER II.

IDEOLOGY AND THE NATURE OF SECTS

> Sects are movements of religious protest. Their members separate themselves from other men in respect to their religious beliefs, practices and institutions and often in many other departments of their lives. They reject the authority of orthodox religious leaders and often, also, of the secular government...sectarians put their faith first: they order their lives in accordance with it. The orthodox, in contrast, compromise faith with other interests, and their religion accomodates the demands of the secular culture. (Wilson:1970:7)

Two terms are commonly used to refer to groups such as the Children of Light Brotherhood: "sect" and "cult". Neither of these has acquired a universally accepted meaning. Some researchers use the two more or less interchangeably, while others have assigned separate meanings to each (Stark:1982). I have elected to refer to the Brotherhood as a sect for reasons of my own.

The term "cult" has acquired some extremely negative connotations, particularly in recent years. Cultists are stereotypically wild-eyed fanatics,enthrall to a charismatic, fraudulent leader. More scientifically, some researchers depict cultists as being extremely individualistic, and cults as such loose-knit organizations that the only coercive power the group has over its members is derived solely from the individual member's level of commitment (Wallis:1974). This description did not seem to fit what I had observed among the Children of Light.

To me, "sect" seems less pejorative than "cult". Of course, the Children of Light would probably find both terms insulting. As one member once told another outsider: "we are the only group which is <u>not</u> a cult." Presumably, the same would apply to "sect". After all, to refer to one's own group as a sect or cult implies that there are other communities which are somehow similar to it, an impossibility for the sectarian. But insulting or not, I had to call the Brotherhood something. For my definition of the term and my discussion of the Brotherhood as a sect, I have relied heavily upon the work of Bryan Wilson. I found very little general theoretical material on sects aside from his.

"Sect" should not be confused with "religion". A sect is a group in which religious ideology plays a central role, but it is not a religion <u>per se</u>, or at least, not just a religion; it is also a definite social entity. It would thus be a mistake to examine the ideology of the Children of Light Brotherhood without having a clear

understanding of the nature of sectarianism, which is, unfortunately, what I tried to do. Wilson gives a list of attributes which are typical of sects; the Brotherhood is no exception:

> 1) it is an exclusive organization which does not permit its constituents dual allegiances
>
> 2) it claims monopoly on the complete (or at any rate superior) religious truth
>
> 3) it lacks a clergy or official priesthood
>
> 4) its membership is voluntary
>
> 5) it sets strict standards of behavior for members, and exercises sanctions against nonconformists
>
> 6) it demands total allegiance
>
> 7) it is a protest group, opposed not just to a church, but to the entire outside world
>
> 8) its adherents consider themselves part of an elite by virtue of religious truth
>
> 9) its constituents are extremely conscious of group identity, as those comprising a more "natural" group--a caste or clan say--would not be (1970; 1982)

Other researchers have noted similar characteristics as typical of sects (Wallis:1974). All of the above I came to realize only after I went to live with the community. The creed of the Brotherhood enjoins members to treat all persons as siblings under one Father, and ostensibly they do so; the Children of Light were invariably considerate and congenial to me when I was merely visiting on a daily basis, as they are to all guests. Yet given the list of attributes

above, it is not surprising that the world view of the Brotherhood, despite the precepts of its ideology, is markedly dualistic; its a matter of "Us" versus "Them", us being the Children of Light and them being everything and everyone else. The sectarian nature of the group provides the basis for the distinctions made between insiders and outsiders.

That sects claim monopoly on the complete or superior religious truth perhaps explains why the Children of Light evince reluctance to discuss when the community was formed. When asked, members usually say something to the effect that it all began about two thousand years ago; that is, in the time of Jesus. This always sounded remarkably arrogant and evasive to me, quite aside from the fact that it never answered the question which my informants knew was being asked. As they often went on to say that they themselves had been living together for about fifteen years, this particular little speech formula seemed rather pointless to me besides. As I now realize, this was really the only way members could phrase an answer to the question. Having a monopoly on the complete religious truth, they could hardly claim that their group had been in existence a mere fifteen years when the ideology they espoused was nineteen centuries old.

The Brotherhood is millenarian, what Wilson refers to as a revolutionist (transformative) sect. Adherents believe that the the current world order will come to an abrupt end by Divine intervention--the return of Christ. The Children of Light feel that the return of the Savior is imminent; certainly within the next ten years

and probably within the next five. One woman told me that she had decided not to have children because "the time remaining is so short". When I went to live with the group, many of the members repeatedly told me that I would never have time to get my degree before the start of the Millennium. All were distressed that I was wasting final precious hours in such a wicked and futile secular activity, and told me that I should seriously reconsider what I was doing; the Children of Light believe that the way to salvation is by "dropping out" (their words) of the established order. Doing so will not hasten the Second Coming, but it is one of the steps the individual must take to be assured of salvation, since the secular world and all of its constituents are doomed.

Members place special emphasis on prophecies concerning the last days and the new order. Such prophetic scriptural passages are the ones usually selected for group readings, to the virtual exclusion of all else. Certain aspects of modern society, for example the re-establishment of the nation of Israel, and the constant warfare around the world, are seen as fulfillment of Biblical prophecies. However, the group gives no exact date for Christ's return. I suppose that he will "come as a thief in the night".

I showed up at one of the communal houses of the Brotherhood for my first visit early one evening, a little nervous, and extremely uncertain of my welcome. As it turned out, I need not have been either. I was let in by a man with a benign and rather sleepy smile, who seemed to

have no idea who I was and apparently was not unduly concerned about it. All sorts of people visit the Brotherhood, particularly at dinnertime, and all are welcome. I was unaware of this at that time, and was beginning to wonder if maybe my contact at the University had forgotten to mention that I was coming. He hadn't. The smiling doorkeeper turned me over to two other residents who were better informed about my reasons for being there. We talked for a few minutes, then they went off to help with dinner and left me alone to wander around in the crowd.

There was somewhat of a crowd; about twenty five people, including a handful of small children. There were also a few elderly men and women, but most of the adults were "hippie-types" in their twenties and thirties. Despite the large number of people the house was very clean and orderly, and relatively quiet. I was amused to note that there were Christmas decorations on the walls, and that Christmas music was playing on the stereo. It was the week before Hallowe'en.

"The hippie-types" insisted that I join them for dinner. I had already eaten, and felt besides that I was imposing, but they did'nt see it that way. We all stood around the table and joined hands. Someone took that opportunity to introduce me to the group. Everyone stared and smiled, warmly and benignly; it was horribly embarrassing. As I later discovered, among the Children of Light it is apparently not considered discourteous to make the individual the focus of group attention if that attention is positive, and in such situations staring is allowed.

After my introduction to the group, there was a chorus of "thank you, Father's", and everyone sat down to eat. Since the group was a religious community, I was surprised at how brief the prayer was. Later I found out that the grace before the evening meal was one of the few rituals engaged in by residents of the Brotherhood. Avoidance of ceremonial and structured behavior was one of the ways in which members of the community set themselves off as different from followers of other religious movements (Turner:1969; Wilson:1970).

After dinner one of the young adults, Bob, sat down next to me and started discussing religion, specifically the group's ideology. He was very serious and rather humorless, but unfailingly polite. Later I learned that he was one of the spokespersons for the Brotherhood. Bob's knowledge of the New Testament was extensive, broader than mine certainly. By contrast, his understanding of the Old Testament seemed to derive from a sort of fundamentalist faith rather than any theological inquiry. I had spent a year in Israel studying Biblical Hebrew, and was struck by the difference between what I had learned there and what the Children of Light apparently believed was true of the Old Testament. This made me a little uncomfortable, in that I very much wanted to hear what Bob had to say, and was afraid that in the course of the conversation I would offend him by unwittingly espousing views which contradicted those of the Brotherhood. Fortunately he was more interested in discussing the New Testament than the Old, and for the most part we agreed about it; where we did not, Bob seemed willing to go on to another topic. He was not so much discussing religion as he

was explaining the Brotherhood to an outsider, and finding out if the stranger might possibly fit in.

Bob was very informative; much of what I know about the belief system of the Brotherhood I learned from the discussion we had on the first night I was there. Since faith has such a central role in the community,This knowledge proved an invaluable help in interpreting data acquired later. However, in a way it was also a handicap. During the time I spent observing the group, I had no understanding of the way in which sectarianism defined and controlled the belief system of the Brotherhood. As with other sects, a central (though unconscious) concern of the Children of Light is to maintain their community as a separate and discrete entity. By contrast, Christianity is a universalist creed whose scriptures enjoin adherents to minimize boundaries between human groups: "in Christ let there be neither Jew nor Gentile, master nor slave, rich nor poor, male nor female." Since following such scriptural injunctions would weaken a group's social boundaries, sects often develop special interpretations of these commandments, or place greater emphasis on scriptural instructions to "be not of this world" and not follow the examples set by sinners (Wilson:1982). At the time I was associating with the group, I was unaware of processes of this sort, by which the Children of Light reconciled their beliefs with their sectarianism. It thus seemed to me that adherents of the Brotherhood were often systematically violating principles in which they professed belief.

The Children of Light have developed a sophisticated and internally coherent ideology. Much of it can be traced to logical extrapolation of the teachings of Jesus as set forth in the Gospels. Most of the rest is taken from the non-canonical texts discovered at Nag Hammadi.

Members of the Brotherhood interpret scripture quite literally, professing belief in the Garden of Eden, the Flood, the Immaculate Conception (of Christ, not Mary), and the Resurrection, among other things. Also accepted is the notion that the world is a mere six thousand years old, more or less, and was created in a few days. I was a little surprised at some of this, as the group's approach to ideas outside of religion is extremely rationalistic and imbued with a healthy skepticism; the Children of Light are neither wild-eyed cultists nor typical fundamentalists. When questioned closely, Bob qualified some of his statements, claiming, for example, that even if there had been no physical Garden of Eden as such, there had been some sort of primeval innocence, along with a first human couple who could be considered Adam and Eve. In general, however, he seemed to take the stance that in the conflict between faith and science, science must yield; the scientific method is as skewed as the secular world—the "System"—from which it sprang. Other members with whom I spoke later apparently agreed with him. This attitude is carried over into the everyday life of the commune. For example, though permitted to pursue any subject they choose individually, the children of the group, most of whom do not attend outside schools, are formally taught only arithmetic in mathematics, and no science whatsoever except practical topics such as

health and personal hygiene. I once asked if one of the adolescent girls might study geometry or algebra; I was told that she could if she wanted to, but my informant apparently could see no earthly reason why the child might want to.

To the outsider, the belief system of the Brotherhood is likely to seem more real, more logical and internally coherent, than the faith of many modern church-goers. In part, this is due to the concerted attempt members make to live their religion. There is no dichotomy between ideology and everyday life. The modern Catholic, say, can leave his faith in the church after mass; the Child of Light cannot. Adherents of the Brotherhood are constantly enjoining each other to act with love, to be genial and humble and patient, to feed the hungry and help those in need—in short, to live the creed they profess. It seems to work. Visitors are quick to notice the tranquility that prevails in the houses maintained by the Brotherhood, the lack of strife and contention between members. Expressions of genuine anger are rare, loud quarrels almost unknown. No matter what the stimulus, the Children of Light favor subdued modes of expression. Screaming, shouting, and even slightly raising one's voice are subject to severe group opprobrium. It's very impressive. And a corollary of the emphasis placed on living the faith is that members are in complete agreement on articles of faith--plausible interpretations of scripture which would be difficult to put into practice in everyday life were probably weeded out early in the group's history.

Another possible reason why the belief system of the Brotherhood appears so logical to the outsider is that it is so extremely conscious. Faith is the primary concern of the group. Few contemporary Christians engage in the kind of soul-searching and theological research prevalent among the Children of Light, or attain their level of formal education; there are many college graduates in the group. Members undertake a lot of individual study of the scriptures and related materials, and demonstrate extensive knowledge of the subject. As I found out later, Bob was by no means unique in this respect. However, the knowledge of religion is purely theological. The Children of Light do not see faith as being closely interrelated with the rest of culture. Most members seem to have little understanding of the historical processes leading to the development of Judeo-Christianity, or the social milieux from which it sprang. As I continued my visits, I began to find the discussion of religion with adherents of the Brotherhood to be a rather dismal experience, an exercise in misunderstanding. I was hopelessly out of my depth in matters of theology, and on a completely different wave length from that of my informants whenever I tried to bring an anthropological perspective to bear on the topic. Members seem to hold the same opinion of social science that they does of the scientific method, at least where religion is concerned.

In my first few visits to the community, I was to have many conversations about religion with members of the commune. Guests of the Brotherhood who are young and seem to hold beliefs similar to those professed by the Children of Light, especially those who demonstrate

their interest by repeated visits, are often given a sales pitch by residents of the community; they are seen primarily as possible converts. This pitch generally takes the form of a quiet and persuasive series of theological discussions, all of which seek to establish the essential righteousness of the lifestyle of the Brotherhood. Other young outsiders who had had extensive dealings with the group told me they had been treated to similar theological arguments. After a few visits, these endless conversations about the metaphysical basis of the true religion started to bother me. I was beginning to worry that I would never get any information on any other facet of the Brotherhood, and besides I was rapidly running out of theology. Fortunately after the first month of visiting the Children of Light began to ease up on pursuing these discussions. I do not know if this was because they felt that I was making rapid progress in conversion or perhaps because they had decided that I was not conversion material but held beliefs which were nonthreatening to them as a group.

CHAPTER III.

THE LACK OF STRUCTURE

> The social world is a world of becoming, not a world of being...and for this reason studies of social structure as such are irrelevant. (Turner:1974:24)

One characteristic which visitors of the Brotherhood are quick to notice--and one which many are likely to find immensely appealing--is the extreme informality of the community. In all activities the Children of Light seek to avoid strictly structured, organized behavior, as well as ritual of any sort. This is certainly true of the ideology. Aside from the grace said before the evening meal, and an almost daily morning scripture reading, there is little in the way of structured religious activity in the group. There are no formal prayers or prayer sessions or initiation rites. Members do not ordinarily attend outside churches. There is no ritual communion or baptism or day of rest. There is also, apparently, no glossalalia, thaumaturgy, contemporary Divine Intervention (or Illumination or Manifestations in burning bushes), no canon of saints, faith healing, or any of the various and sundry other obvious phenomena often associated with religious movements. The emphasis among the Children of Light is on communality, agape, fraternal behavior, and reduction of the sort of self-seeking individuality which leads to conflict.

As I said before, the ideology of the Brotherhood cannot be separated from daily life. Group organization is extremely fluid and informal, so much so that the outside observer is likely to conclude that there is no ranking of individuals in the Brotherhood, no social hierarchy, that no member has more authority or influence or power than another. This is true in two senses: first, in that the differences between individuals in the commune are far less than those between members of the surrounding common American society, and second, in that there are no formal marks distinguishing Children of Light who have authority and power within the community from those who do not. All members dress alike, share alike, all have about the same number of material possessions, all are on a first name basis. The outside observer who concluded that there are no status differences in the Brotherhood would in fact be reiterating what members say of themselves: we are all alike, all equal, male and female, old and young. We are all nothing more than Christ said we should be--siblings under one Father. The Children of Light really believe this of themselves, and ostensibly they live up to it.

An example of the ideal of equality being put into practice in the group would be the situation surrounding the founder of the Brotherhood. Members consistently speak of him as if he were just another resident. No amount of prodding on my part could compel any of my informants to admit that he was in any sense the leader of the community, or even the founder. I ought to mention here that I never met the man in question, and thus have no first hand information on the subject. At the time I

was conducting my observations, the founder had run into some difficulties with the law and was absent from the community. However, other outsiders, and one time members who have since left the Brotherhood, have informed me that the founder does receive special treatment; he is the leader. This difference in status is simply not consciously recognized by the Children of Light. Nor did I become aware of any such social ranking until I went to live with the group.

Along with the lack of structure goes a reduction of role distinctions, understandably so, if we accept Nadel's definition of structure as the patterning of roles and role relationships within a social group (1957). I've already noted that there is little status differentiation in the Brotherhood, but the reduction of role goes beyond the mere ranking of degrees of authority and influence in the group. Few divisions of labor, activity, or demeanor are made on the basis of age or sex among the Children of Light. For the most part men, women and children dress the same, act the same, and, insofar as they are able, perform the same tasks. This is in keeping with the tenets of the ideology; members of the Brotherhood feel that the inferior status of women and children in traditional Christianity is due in large part to the influence of St. Paul of Tarsus, whose teachings they reject. A member's position and labor within the group ideally are determined by his/her commitment to the faith and willingness to be a servant to all.

The Children of Light have tried to relegate sexual differences to a purely biological function (reproduction), and have succeeded to an amazing extent; the outsider can hardly fail to notice that there are about as many women in positions of authority and responsibility as there are men. The Brotherhood has also succeeded in some degree in eliminating age as a criterion for delegating responsibility and authority. During the period in which I conducted my observations, one of the highest ranking members was a seventeen-year-old boy who had only been with the group for a year or so.

The Use of Antistructure

The concept of antistructure or communitas was developed by Victor Turner in his discussion of rites of passage (1965). The idea was expanded and refined in his book The Ritual Process (1969). It is a particularly useful concept when discussing so-called "liminal" persons; those who, like the Children of Light, live on the fringes of society or in the interstices of its structure, having little or no status within it.

As Turner sees it, there are two common modes of human social interaction. The first and usually more typical of these is structure, defined by Nadel (1957) as the patterning of roles and role relationships in a social group. Structure is the type of social organization most frequently referred to by anthropologists and

sociologists. However, insofar as the social world is one of becoming as well as being, this is insufficient. According to Turner, consideration of structure is necessary in social enquiry, but it alone cannot account for all the phenomena observed in a society. The researcher must also take into account the second mode of human interaction, the opposite of structure: communitas or antistructure. Turner recognizes three manifestations of this mode.

The first of these, called spontaneous communitas, is the variety most frequently encountered in social life. It is always of brief duration, a sort of interruption of normal structured life. Turner believes that most societies operate in the structural mode, but that this alternates with brief periods of spontaneous communitas. In technologically advanced societies, communitas may take the form of love-ins or office parties. In non-western cultures, it often accompanies major changes in the life state: birth, circumcision, initiation into adulthood, marriage, death. After the individual is ritually divested of one status (e.g. single) but before he/she is formally installed in another (married), he/she is perceived as some sort of ambiguous, liminal being, having no recognized niche in society. The patterning of roles cannot apply to the roleless; structure recedes as the dominant mode of organization, and communitas takes over for the duration of the liminal period (1969).

Liminality is associated with all forms of communitas. Its charactersitcs are the opposite of those of status (a status, or recognized niche in a particular social pattern, being the primary feature of the person living within structure) as can be seen below:

LIMINALITY	STATUS
transition	state
totality	partiality
homogeneity	heterogeneity
communitas	structure
equality	inequality
anonimity	systems of nomenclature
absence of property	property
nakedness, or uniform clothing	distinctiveness of clothing
sexual continence/excess	sexuality
minimization of sex distinctions	maximization of sex distinctions
absence of rank	distinctions of rank
humility	just pride of position
disregard of personal appearance	care of personal appearance
no distinctions of wealth	distinctions of wealth
unselfishness	selfishness
total obedience	obedience only to superior rank
sacredness	secularity
sacred instruction	technical knowledge

(Turner:1969:127)

The above represents merely a general outline of the characteristics of liminality; all of the features listed need not be present in a given situation. Most, however, are found among the Children of Light. Members of the Brotherhood own very little in the way of material possessions and, with the exception of personal effects such as clothing, toothbrushes, and an occasional musical instrument, these are all held in common. The Children of Light also spend a great deal of time worrying about and practicing humility. They have their own definition of this virtue, so that the outsider may not recognize it as such (I didn't), but they consider it a most desirable attribute. In general, by "humility" residents of the Brotherhood mean behaving in the manner favored by the group; comporting oneself quietly and demurely, and yielding to the authority of high status members of the community, especially on matters of theology.

The second type of communitas, ideological, never occurs in real life. It is an ideal type, a label applied to the various utopian models of how society should operate, which human beings carry around in their minds. This is the sort of social organization usually advocated by religious groups and other ideological movements, Marxism being one. This is the form favored by the Children of Light, which members feel they have attained. Turner suggests that communitas, with its egalitarianism, is the unconscious ideal of most human beings. Communitas presents the individual as a whole person, possessed of a common humanity, while structure presents him/her in fragments, as a

mere aggregate of roles. It is no coincidence that adherents of religions and sects advocate a social order founded upon antistrucure (1969).

Ideological communitas is the ideal; the third type of communitas, known as normative or institutional, is the form it takes in real life situations. Here antistructure, rather than structure, has become the dominant mode of human interaction. Institutional communitas is often found among persons who live in a permanent state of liminality--known as marginality--as opposed to the temporary liminality of those undergoing major changes in life state, discussed earlier. Marginality covers such diverse groups as monks, hippies, hobos, street gangs, migrant farm workers, Indian Untouchables, slaves, and the Children of Light. Some persons are born into a marginal state, others are forced into it by political or economic factors, while some, such as members of the Brotherhood, choose it voluntarily (1969).

In keeping with the principles of communitas, the Children of Light strive for homogeneity, to reduce all roles to one. However, as already noted, this reduction is incomplete. There is some role status differentiation, be it ever so minor: adult/child, male/female, high/low status. There are members who always have money for an occasional movie or treat, who have the right to drive the communal car, who decide which activities the group will undertake, who act as spokespersons for the community. These differences are so minimal and

so contrary to the group's ideology that members are generally unaware of them; the outsider who points them out is likely to provoke a hostile and/or defensive response, or a rationalization or evasive change of subject. Again, I learned the hard way. Mentioning the unmentionable is an excellent way to get oneself labeled arrogant and judgmental.

Turner feels that this failure to achieve ideological communitas is inevitable. Simply put, communitas is by nature brief. It is meant to function as a temporary relief from the obligations imposed by structured interaction, not as an alternative to it. No community ever attains ideological communitas because no society can operate indefinitely according to principles of antistructure. Communitas does not provide a stable framework for human interaction. When all are the same, it becomes difficult to distinguish between I and thou. When there are no differences in status, no one has the authority to arbitrate disputes. Constantly dealing with other persons as whole, complex personalities (rather than as one role or another, depending on the situation) places tremendous stress upon every day interaction. For communitas to become the dominant mode of human interaction, therefore, it must incorporate structural elements. Hence the minimal and virtually unconscious, but essential, role distinctions within the Brotherhood (1969; 1974).

CHAPTER IV.

INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS

The ideology of the Children of Light combined with a paucity of structured organization and role distinctions makes for some unique modes of interaction between residents. Many of the interpersonal relationships considered normal in the surrounding secular society are either absent, reduced in importance, or much modified in configuration.

Although there is no marriage, many couples seem to form more or less permanent attachments. I noticed this early in my observation period, and and thought it odd in that it seemed a direct contradiction of the group's ideology. Persons with very high status within the Brotherhood are not only likely to form partnerships of this sort, but also to be most exclusive about them. Later some outsiders and former members told me that individual opinions within the Brotherhood vary as to whether these alliances are proper or not; the leader in particular discourages sexual fidelity, and may even encourage couples who are overly-fond of one another to undertake trips or other activities which will separate them for definite periods of time. I have no firsthand knowledge of this myself, but if it is true it fits a pattern. In his article on social boundary systems, Yehudi Cohen (1969) states that when intergroup boundaries are rigid, intragroup boundaries are perforce weak. The Brotherhood is a rigidly bounded system, so that the first

loyalty of members is to the commune, in order to maintain the discreteness of the community. Were boundaries between aggregates of individuals within the group (i.e. such as those between couples) equally marked, problems of divided loyalties would most likely ensue. Among the Children of Light, exclusive interpersonal relationships are de-emphasized, usually by diverting attention from them; they are not generally discussed openly, and persons involved in them are encouraged to engage in separate activities. Overt displays of affection between couples, intimate friends, or parents and children are rare and very unobtrusive. During ten months of observation, I never saw adult members kiss each other, passionately or otherwise. Many outsiders, upon being told that the Children of Light do not believe in marriage, immediately envision wild orgies in the communal living room. This is simply not the case. Members of the Brotherhood may procreate profusely by middle class American standards, and they live communally, but the act of copulation itself is performed in absolute privacy, to the best of my knowledge.

Women and Children

I was informed by an outsider who had spent some time with the community that, due to the shortage of women, men who join the Children of Light are expected to refrain from sexual relationships for their first year with the group. Women who join are not similarly

constrained. I cannot say whether this information is true or not. Males do seem to outnumber females in the community, except among the children.

The only methods of birth control practiced in the commune are abstainence and the rhythm method. I do not know whether abortion is considered acceptable or even if it occurs; I suspect not. Some of the women have borne four or more children, although I was assured that it is entirely up the individual whether or not she bears any. Children are delivered at home, usually in one of the quieter houses, with the aid of other community members. No outside doctor or midwife is called in. All youngsters are breastfed for the first year or so.

Although biological kinship is de-emphasized, the natural mother usually has full responsibility for a youngster during infancy, and often for some years afterwards as well. The mother's special influence may continue well into the child's adolescence. The oldest child I met at the Brotherhood, a fifteen-year-old girl, still spent much of her time living and traveling with her mother, although she had begun taking on adult chores and responsibilities some time before.

In general women, at least those who have given birth, spend much more time in youth-related activities than do either men, or women who have borne no children. Women do most of the formal teaching and informal nurturing, organize most play activity, and in addition have almost total care (feeding, dressing, bathing, etc.) of preschoolers. By contrast, adult male interaction with children is frequently

disciplinary, sometimes playful, but only rarely is there an assumption of total responsibility. When this situation does arise, it is usually of brief duration, the man acting as a temporary surrogate for the absent mother. Thus motherhood interferes with a basic ideological tenet of the Brotherhood: that all are equal and must be treated the same. I doubt that this division of roles is deliberate, since the Children of Light in general appear unaware of it. They consider it a matter of course and necessity that children who are breastfed must remain with their mothers for their first few years of life; what special affection that develops between mothers and children is the natural result of continuous interaction. In addition, this role division varies between individuals. A few of the men spent a great deal of time interacting with the youngsters and seemed to take a special interest in them. Some of the women left their children in the care of others for extensive periods, while others took theirs with them just about wherever they went.

A special mother/child relationship is tolerated only as long as it does not become too obvious or exclusive. Here again, the first loyalty of members of the Brotherhood is to the group; intragroup boundaries must be weaker. A child who is overly attached to his/her mother becomes subject to much disapproval and ridicule by other members. I watched this happen with Zebedee, age two. He was very dependent upon his mother. Karen, who was expecting another child. After Zebedee was weaned Karen tried to weaken his attachment to her by not allowing him to be with her constantly. One afternoon when I was at the house, she

decided to go to the store, and told her son he could not come along. Zebedee burst into tears and begged to be allowed to go with her, at which the other residents present began teasing and ridiculing him. Karen left him crying, and the other adults tried to divert his attention, but none of them offered him any comfort or sympathy. When he had calmed down I mentioned to one of the women, Lauren, that he seemed very dependent on his mother. She looked disgusted and said "Yeah, it's really ridiculous. It'll be better when the new baby comes."

The biological father of any given child is likely to be known in the Brotherhood, but he is never overtly recognized. The Children of Light express the concept of motherhood, for example, by saying that Zebedee "came through" Karen or Simha "came through" Pam. A similar expression encompassing fatherhood is not in use; biology dictates that motherhood must be discussed even if members claim that the concept has no social significance, but the same does not hold true for male parentage. This situation made observation of kin interaction and kinship configuration difficult for me. Sometimes I could guess who the father of a particular child was by the physical resemblance or how long a couple had been living together, but I could never be certain. The one time I asked directly "who is Moria's father?", my informant laughed out loud and walked away. During the time I spent observing the group, one newborn baby was named "Joavi" (Hebrew for"God is my father"). Perhaps no other comment need be made on the subject.

Children are looked upon as younger brothers and sisters, but they do not have quite the same status as their adult "siblings". Corporal punishment is infrequent and always done in private, but members assured me that it does take place--I do not know for what behavior. I never saw an adult strike a child, but I heard many adults speak angrily to children. All of the adults in the community have the right to command or rebuke any of the children; all of the children are expected to heed and obey any of the adults. Parents do not get upset when other members scold their children, even though some seem to do so in excess. The seventeen-year-old male with high status mentioned earlier was constantly harping at the youngsters, pointing out their faults in front of other persons in a manner which I thought was quite rude and which irritated me very much. No one else seemed to notice.

Formal signs of the status difference between adults and children are not in evidence. Children dress like adult members, are spoken to as if they were small adults, and are expected to have much the same demeanor: quiet and gentle, never pert. Boisterous play is not permitted, the participants usually rebuked by being informed that they are not being humble.

Children are encouraged to take on whatever chores they are capable of performing at a very early age; willingness to help out is considered a sign of maturity and commitment to group values. I saw three-year-olds set the table for the evening meal, and eight-year-olds who did no work whatsoever. As among adult members, children who do not do their fair share of the work are usually not forced to co-operate,

but they have less status than those who do, and are likely to receive more expressioins of adult disapproval.

Between the children of the Brotherhood themselves there are almost no role differences. It is here that the social organization of the group comes closest to its religious ideal. There are no significant social differences between boys and girls—clothing, hair styles, play activities and chores are the same for both, so much so that until the kids reach puberty their gender may be hard for the outsider to guess. When I was visiting the commune on a daily basis, I was particularly taken with one youngster, an outgoing, laughing, seraphic featured child called Notsri. She was about eight, loud and excitable, in every way a complete opposite of the Brotherhood's ideaal child. Members considered Notsri hard to manage, but I thought she was delightful. To me she was a welcome change from the quiet, well-behaved children, a number of whom I found unbearably whiney and moralistic. It took me five months to figure out that this pretty, doe-eyed child with waist-length hair was a boy. I had never bothered to ask, and members never specifically mentioned the sex of any of the children, not considering it important. Actually I probably should have guessed, since in Hebrew "Notsri" is a masculine noun/adjective.

CHAPTER V.

ON BEING DIFFERENT

During the months I spent visiting the Brotherhood on a daily basis, it often seemed to me that members were consciously trying to be different from other Americans, beyond the differences demanded by their faith. This can be seen in their dress. Clothing is similar for all: jeans, work shirts or peasant blouses, hiking boots or other functional footwear. In mild weather many go barefoot. Persons of all ages and both sexes wear crosses around their necks and have long flowing hair. The men without exception are bearded. When asked why they do so, members answered that they dress after the manner of the poor, as Christ did, and that they are rebels against the "System", as Christ was. This is of course a plausible interpretation of scripture, but more often than not, these modes of behavior serve to alienate persons outside the community, persons whom according to the dictates of faith the Children of Light are expected to reach out to and bring to Christ. By means of some rather devious indirect questioning, I had on more than one occasion managed to get some of the high status members to admit, individually, that there might be other plausible interpretaions of scriptural injunctions than those they followed, even though this point was always conceded with the greatest discomfort and reluctance. Presumably, some of these alternate interpretations would not be quite

so alienating to the outside world. However, as sectarians, the Children of Light have a need to be as different from outsiders as possible.

It should also be noted that residents of the community do not always adhere to their own dress code, something they would certainly diligently attempt to do if it were primarily an article of faith. During one visit to the commune I was surprised to note that one of the little girls was wearing a dress. On a later visit Maria, one of the members, came across mention of this in my notebook and was surprised--and amused--at my surprise. The Children of Light, she explained, wore jeans and work shirts because that was the style of the modern poor, but most of the women of the group also owned a dress; she did not state for what purpose. Thus although a distinctive style of clothing is in keeping with the tenets of group ideology, there seems to be more to it than that, since certain liberties can be taken with the dress code. However, these liberties fall within a prescribed range, and thus provide yet another means of strengthening intergroup boundaries.

As noted earlier, the Children of Light accept as scripture the Nag Hammadi codices. These are Gnostic texts of the second and third centuries a.d. Helmbold defines Gnosticism as a belief that knowledge, rather than faith or grace or baptism, is the key to salvation. Not knowledge in general, but essentially a kind of mystical self-knowledge.

The early Gnostics believed there was a chain of intermediate beings between the ineffable God and the world of sense, with the intermediaries becoming progressively less divine and more human-like as one moved down the chain. Some Gnostics venerated snakes, others, female demigods. Many theologians have considered Gnosticism to be the product of a synthesis of Hellenistic philosophy and Hebraic ideology (Helmbold:1967).

Obviously the Children of Light are not Gnostics in this sense. I found no evidence of similar beliefs among them. Perhaps a major, though unconscious reason for adopting the Nag Hammadi material is that it sets the Brotherhood apart from the rest of society. Sects exist in opposition to the outside world. Professing belief in non-canonical scripture is one way in which adherents of the Brotherhood set their group off as different from traditional Christian groups.

Language as a Boundary Marker

> The argot of criminals and the jargon of lawyers, doctors and professors differ from one another and from all other kinds of speech, but they share a similar function: to display in-group solidarity and to maintain a boundary against outsiders. (Farb:1973:139)

What applies to the speech of criminals and professionals applies to the Children of Light as well. The Brotherhood is a separate, discrete speech community, possessing both its own jargon and its own set of paralingual signals. Special words and phrases are used by the Children of Light in discussing their organization and beliefs. Members of the Brotherhood, and their ideology, are "Christic", not Christian. The Children of Light speak of the teachings of Christ, the Gospels, the Metagospels and the apostolic community, but these in their opinion do not constitute Christianity. Another special phrase is "the System", members' term for the outside world—it is even translated as such in their editions of the Gospels. "The System" means the same thing as "the Establishment", a term which members use somewhat less frequently, perhaps because it is employed by so many outsiders.

Given names also serve to distinguish the Brotherhood from the rest of society. Most children born to the community have Biblical first names, or names derived from Greek or Hebrew words. It is an effective isolation mechanism; few persons in the larger American society are called Israel, Kinneret, Melechel, Sheva, Tikva, Ezra or Cephas. The name for Christ used within the group performs a similar function. Members refer to him as "Joshua", the English form of the Latin transliteration of the Biblical Hebrew "Yehoshua" (1971). When asked why, members claim that they call him Joshua because "that's his real name." But the Biblical form would be Yehoshua, the modern Hebrew, Yeshu or Yeshua. Joshua is no closer to any of these than is the Latin Jesus in common use, which the Brotherhood studiously avoids.

One phrase characteristic of the Brotherhood is "very amazing". It is a comment members frequently make about certain phenomena of their communal existence, which they feel are being directly and specially influenced by God. For example, the fact that residents of the Brotherhood usually have enough to eat no matter who shares the meal with them (and taking into account that members do not work for wages, so that daily income is very uncertain) is often proclaimed to be "very amazing". Most outsiders with whom I spoke seem to take the same attitude towards the phrase that I did, that it is used too frequently; by the end of my study period I felt that if I were to hear it uttered one more time I was going to scream with irritation. Yet it is not the utterance itself which is likely to strike a discordant note with the nonresident so much as the way in which it is spoken. "Very amazing" is what most persons would recognize as an emphatic phrase, yet the Children of Light commonly say it in a subdued, unemphatic tone of voice, with a sincere but quiet intensity. As I soon discovered, a monotone "very amazing" can be very disconcerting to the uninitiated.

The paralanguage of the Children of Light differs significantly but subtly from that of most Americans. As Goffman says: "Indeed, the understanding of a common body idiom is one reason for calling an aggregate of individuals a society" (1963:35). Paralanguage can be defined as gestures, facial expressions, postures, pitch, tone, use of space, and all other nonverbal signals used in communication (Hall:1959; Farb:1973). Members of the Brotherhood make different uses of conversational space than that typical of the surrounding secular

society. For example, they may sit or stand as close (say three to eighteen inches away) even to relative strangers as most of us would consider appropriate only for persons on very intimate terms, but converse about an impersonal topic. Or the opposite may occur: I felt distinctly uncomfortable having someone discuss his/her loving concern for me in a roomful of people at a distance of five or six feet. As I mentioned before, the Children of Light rarely touch each other, although physical contact is something most members of our society would expect of persons conversing at intimate distance. In addition to setting the Brotherhood off as different, perhaps these variant uses of personal space, synthesizing the personal with the impersonal, also serve to minimize boundaries between individuals and thus facilitate communitas. This takes Cohen's discussion of social boundary systems one step further: where intergroup boundaries are well defined, not only intragroup but also interindividual boundaries within the group must be comparatively weak, and certain social mechanisms wil exist to make and maintain them so (1969).

Perhaps I should mention that aside from the use of space, tone and pitch, the paralanguage behavior of members of the Brotherhood is not really all that different from that of the rest of American society. It's more as if the variety of postures, facial expressions and gestures available for members' use has been reduced. For example, I found only two facial expressions to be common: the gentle benign smile signifying general goodwill and relaxation of tension (that is, everything positive), and the grave contemplative look signaling the onset of

disagreement, disapproval, or contention (everything negative). It took me months to figure this out. When I went to live with the community, I sometimes wondered what it was about the mannerisms of some of the members that I found so perplexing and occasionally even annoying. This was probably it. With their subdued tones and limited facial expressions, I was never quite sure of the intensity of my informants' feelings at any given moment. Sometimes I had only the vaguest guess as to what they <u>were</u> feeling.

Reference Groups

A reference group is a social group with which an individual compares his/her actions, values, and beliefs. Interestingly, a reference group need not and often is not a group to which the individual actually belongs. In fact, the group need not exist in any real sense whatsoever; it is possible to compare oneself to the knights of King Arthur's Round Table, for example, or to some community which exists only in one's own imagination (Shibutani:1962).

At first glance, the Children of Light appear to have only one reference group: the Brotherhood itself. Were this actually the case, the concept would have little value in this discussion. "Reference group" would have much the same meaning as the ethnic unit, ethnic group, and cultunit described by Barth (1970), Bessac (1968), and others. However, I've noted two other groups with which the Children of Light compare themselves.

One of these is the apostolic community of the early Christian church. Adherents consider themselves to be a continuation of the fellowship of Christian believers of the period which immediately followed the Crucifixion of Jesus. In a sense, they feel that they <u>are</u> that apostolic community.

Now it is patently obvious to the outside observer that the Children of Light are not really members of the original apostolic community, all of whose constituents, we assume, are long dead. They are merely comparing themselves to the early apostles; they claim to have the same values and beliefs, the same lifestyle. For all practical purposes, the original community probably ceased to exist in any recognizable form soon after Constantine declared Christianity the state religion of Rome in the fourth century A.D. (Gascoigne:1977). A point of interest here is that very little is really known for sure of the actual organization of the early apostolic community. The New Testament states in the Book of Acts that the early believers held property in common, and there is reason to suspect that they lived communally as well, for self defense if for no other reason. The rest of their lifestyle, and much of their systems of values and beliefs, are anyone's guess. Did they work for wages? Did women have equal status to men? We can suggest plausible answers to these and other questions, given knowledge of the scriptures and the social situation of the alter roman empire, but these cannot be proven. In effect, in attempting to be different from outsiders, the Children of Light have taken as a reference group a quasi-mythical community. Much of their information on the early apostles derives from Christian tradition, but the rest is of their own devising, so that what appears to be an outside reference group is really not. In a sense, the Children of Light are comparing themselves to themselves.

The second reference group of the Brotherhood is the outside world—the ubiquitous "them". I found this interesting, because most researchers use the term in a positive sense; a reference group is a group with which an individual compares him/herself because he/she wishes to emulate its members, or because the individual considers him/herself in some way to be a part of that group. The Brotherhood's view of the outside world is the opposite of this. In effect, the Children of Light hold it up and say: "this is precisely what we are not and have no desire to ever be". Because of this, I would like to suggest that the outside world constitues a negative reference group for the Brotherhood.

Part II

THE VIEW FROM INSIDE;

ADVENTURES OF AN AMBIGUOUS BEING

CHAPTER VI.

THE TRANSITION

> ...it is clear that boundaries persist despite a flow of personnel across them. In other words, categorical ethnic distinctions do not depend on an absence of mobility, contact and information, but do entail processes of exclusion and incorporation whereby discrete categories are maintained despite changing participation and membership...one finds that stable, persisting, and often vitally important social relations are maintained across such boundaries... Ethnic distinctions do not depend on the absence of social interaction and acceptance, but are quite to the contrary often the very foundations on which embracing social systems are built. Interaction in such a social system does not lead to its liquidation through change and acculturation; cultural differences persist despite interethnic contact and interdependence. (Barth:1970:9-10)

In the spring of 1982 I began making arrangements to travel to another city in which the Brotherhood maintained communal houses and take up residence with the group. I had mentioned my interest in doing this to several members on different occasions, and they seemed to think it a good idea. The Children of Light maintained a couple of communal

houses near to where I lived, but I thought it would be better if I traveled to another area for this part of my research. Many more members of the community lived in the city which I chose to visit than in my home area. Also, in making the trip I was putting hundreds of miles between myself and the possibly distracting influences of friends, employers, and acquaintances (and the Children of Light do not have telephones in their houses). However, in taking up residence in another city I would still be dealing with members with whom I was already acquainted. The Children of Light keep in touch with each other mainly by traveling frequently to the different cities in which there are communal residences. Some members relocate in this manner as often as every three or four months, and may change houses within a single city even more often. When I was visiting the group on a daily basis, I would sometimes be introduced to a particular member for the first time, only to find that by my next visit a week or so later he or she had already moved on.

In May of 1982 I wrote a long letter to the residents of the area I wished to visit, explaining my research and asking for permission to come and stay with the community. I tried to be explicit about what I was doing, even though I felt as though I had told them all so many times before that I was being redundant. I tried to keep my requests simple: a private or semiprivate room in which I could do my work with a minimum of distraction, permission to stay as long as six weeks, and permission to bring my dog, Ness, along if necessary. I mentioned the last only in passing, not really believing I would end up having to

bring Ness with me, since I had already spoken to some friends in the Missoula area who seemed willing to take her while I was doing my research.

In reply to my letter I received a postcard saying something to the effect of:

"the world = thesis
Christ = antithesis
Children of Light Brotherhood = synthesis.
Come along!"

It seemed I was welcome. Perhaps I ought to mention, also, that I found this reference to Hegel's dialectic reassuring. It seemed to indicate that members of the Brotherhood were not quite as far removed from academia as I often considered them. Here was something we had in common.

It now seems to me that, to the Children of Light, a request to come and observe the Brotherhood probably indicated an interest in joining. However, had anyone tried to tell me this at the time these letters were exchanged, I would not have believed it, since as far as I was concerned I had never given my informants any reason to think I was considering joining. The truth is that in a way I did give them that impression. The world view of the group is absolutely dualistic, as I said before. I think that the idea that a young person who superficially shared much of the commune's belief system, behavior

pattern and style of dress could nonetheless be firmly entrenched within "the System" (and happily so), was in a sense beyond members' comprehension, or perhaps, so far outside what they would consider a range of acceptable possibilites that they really could not deal with it. This might help explain one difficulty I had with the group after I began living in the community, which at the time confused me utterly. When we were having trouble getting along, the Children of Light were constantly telling me that they had had no clear idea of my purpose for coming to live with them, thereby implying that had they known I would be playing anthropologist, they would not have wanted me to visit. Naturally, I thought this was nonsense, and would refer back to the letters we had exchanged. Whenever I did, I got a strange reaction. My hosts could hardly claim not to have received my note, in which I had outlined my intentions in great detail. Yet to admit having received it would indicate that they not only had been aware of my research, but had given approval for it in advance. To avoid this awkward situation, my hosts never mentioned these letters, and would not discuss them with me. Whenever I referred back to them, members changed the subject. In offering this explanation, I do not mean to imply that the Children of Light were trying to "wiggle out" of anything. Rather, they were attempting to be honest with me while remaining within the bounds of their world view. They had received my letter, but even so had had no real understanding of my intentions.

I originally intended to make the trip in the beginning of summer, about a month after I mailed my introductory letter. Financial difficulties forced me to delay this part of the fieldwork for more than two months. By that the time the friends who had offered to take care of Ness were going on vacation. As I did not know of anyone else willing to take reponsibility for her, I was going to have to bring her with me to the commune. This was a nuisance, but in a way I was relieved; I am very attached to Ness, and the prospect of being separated from her for six weeks had seemed pretty bleak to me. As it turned out, despite the inconvenience I was glad to have her with me later on.

I made the trip in August of 1982. A few days before leaving I sent a brief note to my hosts telling them I was finally coming. Nearly three months had passed since I had first written asking for permission to visit; I seriously considered sending another letter asking again, then waiting for a reply before making the trip, but decided I would be cutting my time far too short if I did. As it was, I would barely be able to squeeze in six weeks of observation before I was due back in Missoula for fall quarter at the University--and at that time I assumed I would probably need that long to be able to make sense of some of the patterns of behavior I had already observed. Under the circumstances, it seemed better to just assume that I was still welcome, let the Brotherhood know exactly when I would arrive, and just show up at the appointed time. The note I sent the Brotherhood was very brief, giving little more than date and time of arrival. It also contained a

half-joking sentence: "the anthropologist arrives!" This was a mistake, and not just because I was far from being a professional anthropologist. In announcing myself this way I told the Children of Light that I was not a potential convert nor even a friend of the group. The Brotherhood had no room for anthropologists who were really going to act the part. In members' world view there were two types of persons: insiders and outsiders, but a professional observer of insiders would not fit comfortably into either category. He or she would be ambiguous, an anomaly.

Notes on Ambiguity

The notion of ambiguity as a social phenomenon was developed by Mary Douglas in her book Purity and Danger (1967). In the sense which she uses the term, ambiguous creatures or phenomena are those which do not fit neatly into the world view of the particular society in which they occur. Animals which had cloven hooves but did not chew cud, or vice versa, were ambiguous to the ancient Israelites, since they did not conform to the Hebrew concept of either domestic livestock or wild grazing animals. Flightless birds are ambiguous in many societies; they do not fit the criteria of either birds or land animals. Witches and/or adulterers may be considered anomalies, in that they are part of human society yet work against its precepts and common values--tney are antisocial elements. When I went to live with the Brotherhood, I became an ambiguous entity for the Children of Light--neither an insider nor an outsider, but someone having some of the characteristics of both. Douglas states that when the ambiguous being is allowed to exist, it is usually subject to taboos and rituals. The ancient Hebrews were forbidden to consume anomalous creatures, and were expected to purify themselves ritually after physical contact with animals of this sort. According to Douglas, such rituals and taboos represent attempts to fit the marginal creature into the world view, to give it a recognized taxon of its own; to bring order to chaos.

Taboos and ritualized behavior are applied to ambiguous entities which are recognized as such. Occasionally a society will encounter an ambiguous being where one has never existed before and thus, according to members of the society could never possibly exist. No rituals or taboos apply here; rather, the very existence of the amibiguous entity as such is denied. This was the situation I encountered as a resident at the commune. Among many cultural groups, between the taxa of absolute "us" and absolute "them" are many in-between categories: "almost us", "almost them", and "unaligned", for example. The world view of the Brotherhood really allows for nothing comparable to this; those who are not Children of Light must perforce be Children of Darkness.

The above seems directly contrary to the group's ideology, which states that all human beings are siblings under the Father. Here, I think, the tenets of sectarianism abrogate those of faith. The closest the Children of Light come to having a categoriy of "almost us" is their acceptance of the idea that there may be true followers of Christ who do not live with the Brotherhood, but this is not quite an in-between taxon. In the first place, the general attitude of members seems to be that most of these other believers live far away; were they to move to the vicinity of the Brotherhood, they would most likely consider joining the group. In ten months of observation and questioning, I only heard members mention two such persons: Sister Teresa of Calcutta, recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize, and Colonel Dobey, who works at the Garden Tomb in Jerusalem.

Sister Teresa is a Roman Catholic, Colonel Dobey, with whom I have spoken a few times, is a devout Anglican. Both the Catholic and Anglican Churches are respected parts of the "System", which adherents of the Brotherhood abhor. I seriously doubt that either the Sister or the Colonel would approve of the life-style of the Brotherhood, but this is really a moot point. By acknowledging these two persons as fellow believers, the Children of Light manage to reconcile the dictates of their religion with the demands of their sectarianism.

During my period of residency with the group, I was a full-fledged ambiguous entity as far as the Children of Light were concerned, not a fellow believer. In many of our disagreements during this period, one of my informants would often begin his/her lecture on my wrongdoing with the phrase: "I don't know how you feel about the Gospels, but..." After this had happened half a dozen times, it began to infuriate me nearly beyond endurance. Of course they knew what I felt about the Gospels--I had told them half a dozen times already. In reality I had told them something which they had refused to hear, since according to their point of view it could not possibly be true. Real followers of Christ either act like the Children of Light, or they live in remote areas. On the last night I lived with the group, when I told one of my informants that I basically believed in the Gospels, he stated the group's position on the matter very frankly: "If you really believe then you should drop out, drop out of school and live the way Christ did. The System is bad. The way to salvation is by dropping out."

All of this put me under a great deal of stress. Douglas discusses how a society deals with ambiguity, but makes no mention of how the ambiguous entity feels (1967). To put it bluntly, it was hell. I tried very hard to fit in with the group, in fact, I tried to be even more helpful and courteous and willing than they were. It did not work. The Children of Light recognized my efforts and expressed appreciation for them, but the basic problem remained. As I found out, the ambiguous being can do nothing right until she has justified her own existence.

Life on the Inside

> Sects are very closed communities, sometimes unwelcoming even to those outsiders who might want to join, and hostile to those who wish to enquire, record and analyse. Merely by pursuing his investigation, the researcher appears to sectarians to be commenting unfavorably on their priorities and values. (Wilson:1970:13)

I arrived at the communal house where I expected to take up residence early one Saturday evening. I was surprised to receive a very uncertain welcome. Even persons whom I knew were cautious. No one seemed to know what to say to or do with the novice anthropologist. This bothered me, but I had no idea what to do about it, mainly because I did not know that that was the problem. It was almost dinnertime; I thought that perhaps after that activity had been taken care of we could work things out. I told them I had Ness in the car, but they did not seem anxious to have her in the house among all the people, for which I could hardly blame them. I went and got her, and the two of us sat on the front porch and relaxed.

In a few minutes we were joined by a couple of long-haired little boys. They did not say hello or introduce themselves, and I had no idea what to say to them. I love children, and was always disappointed in my efforts to get to know the kids among the Brotherhood; with the possible exception of the lively little boy called Notsri, I generally got nowhere. Many strangers visit the Brotherhood. I suspect that the children learn at an early age that adult members disapprove of their

being too friendly with visitors.

Ness loves children too, and immediately trotted up to the boys to get acquianted. The kids backed off nervously; as I found out within a few days, just about every child in the commune was scared to death of dogs. One of the boys looked at me curiously.

"Whose dog is that?"

"Mine."

At this the other boy exploded: "Don't say 'mine'! Nothing's yours! Everything belongs to God!"

I had run into this sort of moralizing from the children of the community many times before, and had long since ceased to find it amusing. By the time they reach the age of nine or so, most of the youngsters in the group have adopted the behavior patterns favored by their elders, and demonstrate a remarkably sophisticated understanding of the ideology; I enjoyed talking to them. By contrast, many of the very young children would vociferously parrot adult residents' value judgments and beliefs without having any understanding of them whatsoever. Six-year-old Cephas once treated me to a seven minute tirade on the wickedness of the "System", but when questioned, had no idea what the word meant. Other outsiders have reported similar encounters with the kids. As the youngsters have not yet learned to speak in the quiet and reasonable manner favored by their elders, they are likely to strike the outsider as both rude and priggish.

Understandably then, the childrens' moralistic lectures got old quickly.

This perhaps explains my extreme reaction to the comment made by this particular boy the first evening of my residency at the Brotherhood. I had been on the road for two days, I was hungry, tired and tense and had the beginnings of a raging headache between my eyes. I was prepared to submit to this sort of lecturing from the adults in the community if need be, but not from this peanut-sized proselytizer too short for a soapbox. I looked at him severely.

"Is that your friend?" I demanded, pointing to the other boy.

"Yes."

"Well, Nessie is my dog."

He did not know what to say to that. I doubt that he even knew that I was upset. I looked around to make sure none of the adults had overheard this exchange.

After dinner it was decided that Ness and I should spend the night not at that house, but at another which the Brotherhood maintained outside of town, a quiet house. I had never visited this type of residence before and should have been pleased by the prospect, but by that time I was too tired to care. I had to wait for someone to ride with me to the quiet house, since I did not know where it was. We arrived there fairly late by the Brotherhood's standards; most members

go to bed early and get up soon after dawn. It took another forty five minutes to decide that my dog and I would sleep out on the lawn--here also Ness was not allowed in the house. Actually these sleeping arrangements suited me fine. It was a clear night, I did not particularly like the idea of leaving Ness out in the car by herself, nor did I really feel comfortable about crashing out somewhere on the floor of an unfamiliar house, which is what overnight guests of the Brotherhood usually do. One of the members was also sleeping outside, so it was not as if my dog and I were doing anything extraordinary.

I found out the next morning that the house was full of small children, with a handful of women taking care of them. To me this did not seem like any sort of vacation, but the women appeared contented organizing play activities and washing dishes. There were also a couple of men around, but they seemed to have minimal contact with the children. The only other person in residence was a sort of permanent nonmember, an East Asian exchange student attending a local university. This surprised me very much, as I was beginning to suspect that the Children of Light had no regard for academia. Within a few days I discovered that this woman, Pongri, had absolutely no idea of what the Brotherhood was and why its members did what they did, even though she had been living with the group for months. She had met one of the members in Asia, had told him of her interest in studying in the United States, and had received an invitation to come and live with the community. She did not understand English well enough to figure out what the Brotherhood was all about merely by listening to members talk

among themselves. While I was there she often came by to listen when I was asking questions, and afterwards would tell me that she was glad I had come; those were the very things she herself had always wanted to know about the group but had been afraid to ask.

I would have liked to stay longer at the closed house, but members decided I should move back to the first residence, where I could take part in the community's main project of serving a daily free lunch in a nearby public park. A bed and desk were made available to me in a small furnished building behind the main house. For the duration of my stay I shared this single room with Ness and another nonmember, Linda. She was in her late thirties, had recently been turned out of her house by her grown daughter, and had nowhere else to go. She was interested in joining a group like the Brotherhood. We got along well.

Much of the activity of the open house where I lived centered around the free lunch, which was served to anyone who wished to partake. Sometimes more than sixty people attended. Food was donated to the Brotherhood for this activity by various individuals, food markets, and warehouses in the area. Naturally, preparing a meal for so many required hours of work and the co-operation of several persons. Members took turns cooking and transporting the food to the park, then cleaning up afterwards. Lunch was scheduled for noon; preparation began at about ten a.m.

This meal was very much a social affair. Some of the outsiders who joined the Children of Light for lunch were women with small children, or elderly persons, many of whom looked as if they really needed the food. Most of the other outsiders, however, were young male drifters who seemed to drop by mainly for the company and fellowship. After eating they would remain with the group to chat and share marijuana and alcohol with the Children of Light; this sometimes went on for hours. Afterwards people would gradually drift away by twos and threes until only a very small group was left, at which time members of the Brotherhood would begin to gather up the pans and dishes and trash and head back to the house.

Aside from free lunch, there seemed to be very little going on at the Brotherhood while I was there. The day began shortly before seven a.m. Children were served breakfast, but most of the adults took only coffee or tea. This was followed by a short get together and scripture reading conducted by one of the high status members; the passages he or she selected for this purpose invariably dealt with the Second Coming of Christ. Afterwards residents would go their separate ways, some doing housework or running errands while others began to prepare lunch. At the quiet house, where members were not involved in the free lunch service, children were generally taken outside for some organized play activity at this time.

Afternoons at the Brotherhood were very quiet. Members engaged in various individual activities at this time, such as reading or going for walks. I usually took a nap or went downtown; anything to get away for awhile. I found that one of the most pressing problems I had when I lived with the group was a lack of personal space; it seemed as if I was constantly surrounded by people. The Children of Light are in general quiet and congenial, but this did not make it any more bearable. I am solitary by nature. After a few days I began to look forward to the afternoons.

Dinner was usually served around seven p.m., and residents started wandering back to the house an hour or so before this. At the time I was living with the group, one particular woman did most of the cooking for the evening meal, apparently because she enjoyed the task. At other houses I visited, chores such as this were rotated among members, and generally several individuals would be involved in preparing dinner; understandably so, since there are usually twenty to thirty people living in a house at any given time. There are also likely to be a number of guests sharing the evening meal.

Evening activities were more socially oriented than those of the afternoon. Most of the adults watched the six o'clock news on television before dinner--the Children of Light express a great deal of interest in politics and world affairs. After dinner residents of the house either watched more television or gathered together in small groups to talk and enjoy each other's company. Most persons retired by ten a.m.

Even if I had not been an ambiguous entity, I would have had difficulties adjusting to life in the Brotherhood. I am firmly convinced that I was never meant to be a Child of Light. The lack of personal space which I found so uncomfortable was really only a symptom of the Brotherhood's orientation towards the group and group activitities. It is not that there is a lack of individuality among the Children of Light, so much as that many individual differences are expected to take second place to the demands of the collective community. In practical terms this amounted to the same thing as a lack of individuality as far as I was concerned, however. This was manifested in various ways, of which one in particular was very awkward for me: the longer I associated with the group, the harder the time I had remembering the names of individuals within it. I knew who people were in terms of who their sex partners or children were, and of course could tell them apart physically, but members acted and talked and dressed so much alike that in one sense they really ceased to be individuals for me; many of them became nameless.

I found it hard to take part in some of the social life of the Brotherhood; my reluctance to do so was interpreted by the Children of Light as aloofness. For example, after lunch in the park I rarely sat with the group and socialized with the outsiders--instead, Ness and I would go swimming in the river nearby. It was not that I did not enjoy the company and conversation so much as that I had no real desire to drink or smoke. There were other things I had rather do on clear summer afternoons. I don't care much for marijuana, and besides, I had

uncomfortable visions of the local police putting in an appearance and rounding us all up as we lay out under the trees in the throes of euphoria. And as far as the alcohol was concerned, I thought two or three times before taking a sip off a bottle which had been in the mouths of fifteen other persons--some of whom, in my considered opinion, were in dire need of a bath. The times when I remained with the group, but declined to partake of the alcohol and marijuana, I received disapproving glances, no matter how politely I phrased my refusal. It seemed safer to go swimming.

One aspect of life at the commune which I found very difficult to accept was the relative lack of physical activity. Children in the Brotherhood are encouraged to go outside, play active games and get fresh air, but many of the adult members apparently do not feel the need. I did. Before coming to live with the group Ness and I would sometimes put in as much as fifty miles a week hiking and camping; I took part in some organized sports as well. The lack of opportunities for exercise as a resident of a very laid-back and mellow urban community was the source of a good deal of stress for me. The Children of Light had a lot of leisure time, but they seemed to spend most of it sitting around and talking. At one point when I was feeling especially restless and closed in, I quietly exploded, and demanded of one of my favorite high status informants, Russel: "What do you people <u>do</u> with your time?" Of course, he could not come up with an answer which would make me feel any better. I was expressing my frustration, rather than looking for information.

I also had trouble adjusting to the eating habits of the group. I soon discovered that I was used to eating more each day than most residents were, even the men. I was constantly hungry. This was partly my fault; I could have gotten more to eat had I asked, but I felt uncomfortable asking when no one else did. Sometimes I didn't care for the sort of food which was available, either. The Children of Light eat what is set before them. It was difficult for me to do the same where some items were concerned; I am not particular about food, but I have a serious aversion to anything as non-nutritive as Kool-Aid, which was one of the community staples.

Members of the Brotherhood and I had a real difference of opinion where Israel was concerned. The Children of Light seemed to feel that the rebuilding of the Jewish state, according to scripture, is an indication that the return of Christ is imminent. They also believe that in the final days of the current world order, the Jews will be the most faithful followers of the Messiah. Thus members of the Brotherhood take the attitude that whatever the Israelis do now , since in returning to Judea they have fulfilled God's will, is somehow "righteous". When I first heard this view expressed, I was simply incredulous. Like me, many members had been in Israel-- and like me, had probably met plenty of unrighteous Jews there. The Children of Light also seemed almost totally unsympathetic to the Arabs. On the whole, I found this view of Israel to be so preposterous that I tried to avoid discussing the subject. In general, members of the Brotherhood are ardent pacifists and vehemently opposed to any sort of nationalism. That they could make

what to me appeared to be exceptions in the case of Israel really astounded me.

One other thing about the Children of Light which bothered me was their attitude towards animals. There were pet cats at some of the houses I visited, but in general members seemed to have little interest in non-human creatures. This indifference sometimes struck me as very callous. I remember one instance in particular. Some outsiders had joined the group for the evening meal. One asked why the Children of Light ate meat; didn't they know they know how cruel commercial American meat production practices were? In reply Lynne simply smiled and shrugged: "We're aware of all that. How can you expect people to treat animals right until they learn to treat each other right?"

Members of the Brotherhood were discouraged from forming deep attachments to pets. Persons interested in joining the group were usually required to get rid of any animals they owned before coming to live with the commune. This was partly practical, since there really wasn't room in the communal houses for everyone's dog, cat or gerbil. But it was also done to weaken exclusive bonds between individuals; as in the case between sexual partners or mothers and children, exclusive relationships between owners and their pets were not compatible with well-defined group boundaries (Cohen:1969). Here again, I sometimes thought the Children of Light could be callous about this. My roomate, Linda, arrived at the Brotherhood with a little dog to which she was very attached. The Children of Light told her quietly but firmly that if she wished to live with them she would have to get rid of the animal.

They would not even permit Buffy to come into the room with us, even though the dog was tranquil and well-behaved and Ness was allowed inside. Linda chained Buffy up in a nearby vacant lot during the day, and locked her in her car at night. She was very distressed about having to give up the dog, and was sometimes reduced to tears when she tried to discuss the matter with me. But she was very interested in joining the group and was thus torn between commitments.

The Children of Light so disliked the idea of my having Ness with me that I often wondered why they had not specifically told me not to bring her when they answered my introductory letter asking for permission to visit the community. The only reason I can think of as to why they did not was that, at the time they received my letter, they thought I was interested in joining the Brotherhood, in which case I could always be convinced to give the dog away after I arrived. When it became apparent that I intended to play anthropologist for the duration of my stay with the community, I began to receive unending complaints about the inconvenience of having Ness around. As she was house broken and relatively well behaved, and I had already explained more than once why I had been forced to bring her with me, I found the continued harping on this one particular theme exasperating. Afterwards I realized that although residents of the Brotherhood were not permitted to keep dogs, Ness was not really the focus of the complaints--I was. The Children of Light were trying to tell me, in all of the ways available to them, that I did not fit in, did not belong, was not welcome. They did not have my perspective on the situation and thus

could not get to what I considered the root of the problem--that I was an unaccounted for ambiguous being in terms of their world view. Instead, during my stay they came up with numerous complaints about me and persuasive reasons why they thought I would be happier living elsewhere, all very plausible and correct from their point of view, but all transparently masking the real problem as far as I was concerned.

CHAPTER VII.

Roles and Role Taking

The terms "role" and "status" were first defined by Linton (1936). A status is a position in a particular social pattern, which is associated with a certain set of obligations and privileges. A role is the acting out of those obligations and privileges, the dynamic manifestation of a status.

Later researchers have refined and expanded the concepts of role and status. Merton suggested that not one, but a number of roles were associated with a given status. This he referred to as a role set (1957). Ralph Turner's view of the relationship between role and status is similar to this, although it appears slightly contrastive (1962). Turner suggests that a single status is likely to have more than one role configuration, because not all the rights and duties associated with it will be put into effect at the same time. For example, a person may at all times have the status of "teacher", yet the subset of obligations and privileges put into effect when role playing will differ depending upon whether the teacher is interactiong with a student, parent or school administrator. Actually, I feel that Merton and Turner are taking different approaches to the same phenomenon, namely, that the range of behaviors perceived as pertaining to a single status is likely to be vast. Roles are groupings of behaviors; much of human behavior

depends upon the social context of the interaction taking place. Roles do not occur in a social vacuum; for there to be one there must of necessity be some "other-role" to which it relates (Turner:1962; Goffman:1967).

In accordance with the principles of communitas, the Children of Light have attempted to reduce all roles to one. In keeping with institutional communitas, they have not quite succeeded. However, they have managed to eliminate a number of statuses and their concomitant role configurations which are found in the surrounding secular society. There is thus a rather narrow range of types of social interaction possible between insiders.

I've noted two types of insiders at the Brotherhood: members, and nonmembers who are permanent residents. Children actually comprise a third category, since they are members but can attain little status or authority until after they reach puberty. The relationship between the other two classes of insiders is somewhat confusing, in part because the differences between them are not officially recognized by the group; according to the ideology, all residents of the community are the same, are equal. In actual social practice, they are not. Members are those who demonstrate knowledge of the Brotherhood's ideology and profess belief in it. They are the decision-makers and spokespersons of the group, and are usually less than forty years of age. By contrast, the subgroup of resident nonmembers is more a catch-all category, whose constituents range from young to old. Some are newcomers who are interested in joining the group but have not yet adopted all the

characteristics and values expected of members of the Brotherhood. A few are fellow travellers, persons who may live with the Children of Light for months or even years before moving on because they enjoy the lifestyle, but who never consider themselves to be members. Fellow travellers usually retain some individual mannerisms which set them off from real members. Most of the rest of the resident nonmembers are middle-aged and elderly persons who live with the Brotherhood because they are in need of assistance. These may include persons with no living kin, transients, the very poor, the crippled or chronically ill, and the habitually inebriated. Such persons have little chance of attaining a position of authority or high status within the group.

Persons who live with the Brotherhood because they are in need of assistance may sometimes exhibit outrageous behavior, of the sort which members probably would not tolerate in anyone else. I remember a situation involving one of the resident nonmembers in one of the houses I used to visit on a daily basis, an elderly woman named Ruth. She was short tempered and vocal, and possessed a colorful, expressive vocabulary. As the Children of Light do not use either profane or obscene language, Ruth's mode of expressing herself was a continual source of trouble in the Brotherhood. One evening when I was there, she was apparently intoxicated (Ruth had a propensity to wax more vociferous after imbibing) and had spent several minutes swearing at another resident under her breath. Members ignored her until it came time to say grace before supper, at which point someone with high status asked her to please be quiet. Undaunted, Ruth not only refused to comply, but

proceeded to grumble and swear at him too. I laughed (softly), but no one else did. After a few awkward moments, Karen turned on her furiously: "You were asked to be quiet! Would you be quiet, sister?" Since a breach of the prescribed demeanor was a serious matter, none of the residents ever thought Ruth's rudeness was funny. Still, her outrageous behavior was tolerated; she was never asked to move.

The relationship between the two types of insiders, members and nonmembers, is ostensibly that of equals; however, their interaction is characterized by authority and privilege on the part of members versus deference on the part of nonmembers. This difference is only very subtley manifested and not officially recognized by those involved; although I had been observing the community for months, I was not aware that it existed until I went to live with the group and took up the unique social position of "in/outsider".

In saying that resident nonmembers treat members of the Brotherhood with deference, I am not using the term in its colloquial sense, which would seem to imply that nonmembers behave in an obsequious manner towards members. Erving Goffman defines deference as the "symbolic means by which appreciation is regularly conveyed to a recipient of this recipient, or of something of which this recipient is taken as a symbol, extension, or agent" (1967:56). All persons wish to receive these symbolic marks of appreciation, which in a social setting can only be obtained from other persons. The individual has a right expect these marks of favor (i.e. a greeting or handshake, the use of his/her formal title, or having another defer to his/her technical advice), however,

only by behaving in a socially prescribed way. Thus deference is closely interrelated with demeanor, in that in order to receive marks of respect and appreciation the individual is expected to act in ways considered appropriate for his/her social status.

In most societies, deference actually works both ways, in that all the individuals engaging in a particular social encounter can expect to receive some acts of respect and appreciation. However, when those involved in the encounter have different social statuses, these will not be symmetrical. In this situation, the demeanors of the actors will often also be different; the person of lower status may be less well-dressed, employ a less educated mode of speech, and have less self-confidence, for example. What is remarkable in the Brotherhood is that although both members and resident nonmembers have pretty much the same demeanor, they offer each other different symbolic acts of deference. Members have higher status, and nonmembers acknowledge this by deferring to them whenever decisions must be made, by taking orders from them and accepting their advice. In return, members perform symbolic acts of humility for nonmembers: cooking their meals and waiting on them at dinner, washing their clothes, sometimes helping them dress or undress. It is this symbolic humility, combined with a common demeanor, which allows the Children of Light to believe that they are living in accordance with the principles of their faith even while members exercise authority and enjoy special privileges within the community.

As a resident of the community, I noticed that not only were there status differences between members and nonmembers, but also between the members themselves. Bob and his girlfriend Lynne had slightly more authority than Russel, who in turn had much higher status than Cal. I never did figure out how these differences came about; I suspect that there were a number of factors at work. In general, the longer a member had been associated with the Brotherhood the more authority he/she had. However, this was not the only criterion for attaining high status. One of the women, Maria, had been with the group for a relatively short time--less than two years--but had high status. This seemed due to the fact that her boyfriend, Hal, had been living with the group for many years and therefore had a great deal of authority, some of which had apparently "rubbed off" on Maria. Such a situation might serve to explain why Russel had a slightly lower status than Bob, even though they had been with the Children of Light for approximately the same number of years; Russel did not have a partner, while Bob had been with the same high status woman for about eight years, nearly the entire time he had lived with the group.

Perhaps some of the difficulties I encountered as a resident of the group were due to the fact that I did not offer the sort of acts of deference which were expected of me. Insofar as they tried to view me as an insider, the Children of Light treated me as a resident nonmember. Unfortunately, at the time I had no understanding of the configuration of deference versus that of demeanor; since all residents had the same demeanor, I assumed that they offered each other the same sorts of

symbolic courtesies. I did not yield members final authority in matters of theology, nor could I force myself to wordlessly accept their advice or criticism; quite often, according to the precepts of my own social group, these seemed so intimate, arrogant, and self-righteous that they exceeded the bounds of courtesy due a stranger. In many ways the Children of Light appeared to be such typical middle class Americans (and of course I knew that most of them had grown up in the American middle class) that it was sometimes difficult for me to believe or at least to keep in mind that they were part of a different social group.

CHAPTER VIII.

Dealing with "Them"

Role Making and the Dramaturgical Model

The Children of Light have ambivalent feelings towards outsiders and the outside world. In order to continue as a distinct social group they must maintain strong boundaries and avoid contact with foreign elements. However, their belief system dictates that they must maintain relationships with the outside and look upon its human constituents as siblings under God. The Children of Light resolve the apparent conflict between these two obligations by carefully regulating the amount and types of contact they have with the outside world.

Within the Brotherhood, residents' interactions with one another are simplified by the limited number of roles available and the well-defined expectations of the community in matters of demeanor and deference. Newcomers quickly discover which types of behavior will be tolerated-- those who do not soon find themselves asked to live elsewhere. Despite the extremely informal organization, role patterns are remarkably well-defined.

A different situation prevails when the Children of Light interact with members of the "System". Outsiders are not likely to grasp the status differences and concomitant role configurations which exist

within the group. As residents dress alike and call themselves equals, the outsider quite often sees them as being all alike. In addition, the nonresident is unlikely to offer a member the accustomed deference or concede him/her the sort of authority he/she is used to having within the group. On the other hand, insiders are supposed to treat nonresidents as both equals and as outsiders. Thus in any encounter between the Children of Light and other persons, there is some striving to define roles, and a jockeying for position. This is what Turner refers to as role-making. As he says:

> Roles "exist" in varying degrees of concreteness and consistency, while the individual confidently frames his behavior as if they had unequivocal existence and clarity. The result is that in attempting to make aspects of the roles explicit he is creating and modifying roles as well as merely bringing them to light: the process is not only role-taking but role-making. (1962:22)

I believe that very little role-making goes on between the Children of Light themselves, because the range of behaviors considered acceptable is so very narrow and prescribed. It is with outsiders that residents, particularly members, must modify roles. In their contacts with the outside, the Children of Light must convince outsiders that they are what they say they and all other persons are, siblings under one Father, while enacting roles which are consistent with those which they assume within the group. In part they manage to do this by interacting with outsiders only in specific situations and locales. In this manner most nonmembers are keep from viewing those aspects of

in-group life (such as status differences) which might allow them to decide that the Children of Light are not what they say they are.

The delimiting of time and place and the adoption of specific modes of behavior at the time and place of interaction are characteristic of what Erving Goffman refers to as the dramaturgical model of social interaction. Here, a team of performers (the Children of Light) present themselves to an audience (the outside world) as having certain attributes. The audience in turn has the right and even the moral obligation to believe that the performers are what what they present themselves as being. In their turn, the performers have a right to expect that their performance will be believed (1958). Turner expresses it thus:

> a performance, in the restricted sense in which I shall now use the term, is that arrangement which transforms an individual into a stage performer, the latter, in turn, being an object that can be looked at in the round and at length without offense, and looked at for engaging behavior, by persons in an "audience" role...A line is ordinarily maintained between the staging area where the performance proper occurs and an audience region where the watchers are located (1974:125).

and, he adds:

> the central understanding is that the audience has neither the right nor the obligation to participate in the dramatic action occurring on the stage, although it may express its appreciation in a manner that can be treated as not occurring by the beings which the stage performers present on the stage (1974:125-126).

The free lunch which was served in the park by residents of the house where I was living represents a drama. The Children of Light assumed the role of humble servants to the many outsiders who came to eat. Their demeanor was openly friendly and solicitous. Members avoided engaging in any sort of interaction in which they might be required to assert the sort of authority which they were accustomed to having within the confines of the community, authority which was likely to be questioned by the audience. Instead, members and nonmembers worked together to serve the food and afterwards to clean up the area, giving the impression that they were all equals.

The situation with short term guests in communal houses requires a different sort of stage performance. Guests occupy a unique position in the Brotherhood. Some will eventually become resident nonmembers or even members, but others will stay only for a meal, a night, or a few days. Those who will become permanent residents of the group often evince specific characteristics which serve to point them out to the Children of Light; they seem very interested in the Brotherhood, admire its values and achievements, and wish to know more about it. Or they may be persons in need of assistance, those who need a place to stay. Both of these types of guests are usually eager or at least willing to please the Children of Light by adopting modes of behavior of which residents prescribe. Therefore, when such individuals first arrive at a communal house no special performance is necessary. For varying reasons they do not need to be convinced that the Children of Light are what they say they are.

Short term guests are a different matter; they are definitely outsiders. Again, the Children of Light attempt to minimize conflict by transforming their interaction with these guests into a performance similar to the one associated with free lunch, with members presenting themselves as humble servants. Here, however, the status differences and concomitant asymmetrical acts of deference are retained, although residents skillfully divert attention away from them. The symbolic humility is heavily emphasized, while members assert their authority in the gentlest and most inobtrusive manner--so much so that the audience may not catch on to what is expected of it. House performances do not always work--I was witness to at least one which failed miserably, with the audience, composed of three newly arrived guests staying only for dinner, becoming thoroughly obnoxious, loudly expressing unconsidered opinions which directly contradicted values held by the Children of Light. Members handled the situation with composure, first attempting to channel the behavior into more acceptable forms, and when that failed, simply ignoring the guests' discourtesy.

I suspect that the Children of Light engaged in a great deal of role-making in their interaction with me. As an ambiguous being there was no performance they could have offered me which would have been at all convincing. I was a long-term guest with few of the attributes of a resident nonmember. I questioned the authority of members, and unconsciously demanded that residents be all alike because they claimed that they were all alike, all equal. The Children of Light were therefore forced into a position of constantly having to justify what I

perceived as discrepancies between their ideology and their in-group behavior. This, I am sure, contributed to the tension that already existed between us.

In a sense, terms such as "dramaturgical" and "performance" are unfortunate in that they seem part of an attempt to discredit the Brotherhood. This is not at all my intent. Although Goffman states that the performer need have no belief in his own performance (1958), I am convinced that the Children of Light really believe that the image which they present to the public is indeed the same as the one they present to each other. They are in many ways similar of course. Goffman says that to make a performance more believable, a performer plays down or conceals aspects of his/her identity which would be incompatible with the image he/she is trying to present. In order to believe in the performance him/herself, the performer must conceal similar incompatible elements from his/her own conscious recognition (1958). This seems to be what takes place among the Children of Light. They see no discrepancies between their in-group and out-group behavior; they feel they are acting in accordance with their religious principles in both cases. Thus they can hardly be accused of some reprehensible effort to misrepresent themselves and deceive the public. They have merely adopted an excellent strategy for reconciling the demands of their religion with the restrictions imposed by their sectarianism.

CHAPTER IX.

THE WAY OUT

My time as an "outinsider" of the Brotherhood was very brief. I arrived on a certain Saturday, nervous but full of anticipation, and left exactly one week later, disgusted and disappointed, but relieved to get away. My relations with the group, which had been tense from the moment I had arrived, had become increasingly strained during the course of my stay, until finally I was simply glad to give up and leave.

The tension between the Children of Light and me was manifested in a variety of ways. What bothered me most was that, after a couple of days it seemed that I could do nothing to please the group. I was lectured for being arrogant, for being part of the "System", for taking notes on what I observed, for not having made my intentions plain before coming to live with the Brotherhood, and for a host of other offenses. Although I knew better, I could not help but take some of this personally. I was trying very hard to fit in, and consequently felt that the Children of Light were not giving me a fair chance. On the contrary, it seemed to me that they were going out of their way to find fault; more than once I thought I had been unjustly accused. While I had merely been visiting the Brotherhood on a daily basis, I had liked some of the residents very much. As a resident, I was upset to discover that those whom I liked most were now often the most critical of me. I

think I knew even then that it was not who I was , but what I was which offended my hosts, but under the circumstances it was hard to keep any sort of rational perspective. Even ambiguous beings and unwanted anthropologists dislike being constantly criticized.

Looking back, I am surprised at how negatively I viewed the situation while I was there; usually I can get along with most people. Notes taken during that week reflect the strain I was under. Comments written in the margins include: "it's noon, I can hardly wait till bedtime" and "my God, what do they want <u>now</u>?" I began to be very glad I had Ness with me. Whenever things were going wrong, she served as a concrete reminder that there really was an outside world, in which I had an accepted niche. Besides, Ness apparently did not hold the same opinion of me that the Children of Light did; I was wonderful as far as she was concerned.

After a while I began to feel that the demands put on me by the group were getting excessive--it seemed that much more was asked of me than of others. One thing which began to annoy me very much by the end of my stay were the constant requests for money. My funds, as I had told the group in no uncertain terms, were limited. Unfortunately, some members had seen that I had hundreds of dollars in traveller's checks with me. I told them quite frankly that most of this money was not mine; it had been loaned to me for use in case of emergency. Before making the trip to the Brotherhood, I had calculated that I would be able to stay six weeks if I were very frugal and could actually live in one of the communal houses, but no more than two if the Botherhood had

no room for me and I had to pay for outside accomodations. After I arrived it soon became apparent that I would be able to stay no more than two weeks even as a resident of a communal house; I was being "nickled and dimed" to death. since I was in a sense living on the group's charity, I felt I could hardly refuse to give small donations when asked, but I worried about it nonetheless. The Children of Light seemed completely indifferent to the fact that half of my funds did not really belong to me at all.

The one really fortunate result of my unenviable status within the Brotherhood was that I quickly began to understand the organization of the group. As an outside observer visiting only occasionally, I had been unable to make any sense whatsoever of the patterns of behavior I had observed. I had always felt as if I were missing something vital; no people anywhere, I was sure, could always be as happy, as charitable, fraternal, genial and serene as the Children of Light seemed to be. There had to be moments of intragroup contention and strife which I had never witnessed, or there had to be mechanisms to prevent them of which I was unaware. I found both as an "outinsider": mechanisms such as role reductionism, status differences and asymmetrical deference displays to divert intragroup tensions, strife and contention in the group's interactions with me, because in my case the mechanisms failed. I learned more about the Brotherhood in a week of living with the group than I had in the previous ten months of observation; or perhaps it would be more correct to say that in one week I learned how to make sense of everything I had previously observed. Had I managed to stay

longer I doubt that I would have gotten much more information.

A conversation I had with Bob on Friday evening convinced me that the problems had become insurmountable and it was time I left. Bob started out with another lecture on my arrogant behavior. He then went on to say that he did not think that the Brotherhood was the place for me, that I would be happier if I moved out and started visiting again on a daily basis. He had made this suggestion a couple of times before earlier in the week, in a very roundabout fashion. Certainly members of the Brotherhood would have been much happier to have me become a fullfledged outsider again, with a recognized place in their world view, but I really did not think it would help my research at all; I had seen all I needed to from that particular vantage point. It would not only be futile, but prohibitively expensive as well.

Also during this discussion Bob made yet another attempt to convince me that the Brotherhood's lifestyle was the correct one and I should take part in it, by appealing to my religious beliefs. There were after all two ways to eliminate my status as an ambiguous being: to make me a total insider or to make me a total outsider. Because of my age, sex and beliefs (and perhaps because I had learned so much about them) the Children of Light actually spent more time trying to make me an insider, or at least it seemed that way to me. During the course of my stay I got the "hard sell" many times, which added to my sense of being under enormous strain. That I agreed with some of the ideological tenets of the community but not others was both inexplicable and offensive to members, a direct assault on their sectarian monopoly of

the superior religious truth.

Bob started his push for my conversion that night by pointing out how wrong I was to come and observe the group in order to make a report to the outside world: what did I think the reaction of the early apostles would have been to some individual who merely wished to come and observe the apostolic community? I answered as truthfully as I could that I thought the early disciples would have welcomed anyone who showed that much interest, since if they were really living the correct spiritual life it would soon become apparent to the researcher; truth should be its own spokesman. After I said this I wished that I had not, since I was perforce implying that I did not believe the Children of Light were living the one true life. That I might consider their lifestyle to be one of many possible good ones, satisfactory for some persons but not others, was of course inexplicable to the group. Privately I actually thought the question was moot; for me the Children of Light simply did not constitute the apostolic community. On an ideological plane I thus felt that we had reached an impasse, but when I told Bob so he disagreed; he confidently and rather condescendingly remarked that there was hope that sooner or later I might come around. At that point I thought I had heard enough. I informed Bob that I would be leaving in the morning, and would not resume visiting on a daily basis. I outlined my reason for adopting this course of action bluntly: no matter what I did, the Brotherhood would never accept me in the capacity of outside researcher, which was the only relationship I felt I could have with the group. Bob agreed: "In order to stay here, you

would simply have to change." Meaning, I would have to adopt the behavior expected of me, and play the prescribed roles.

At that time, I had an almost overwhelming desire to slap him for what I considered to be outrageous and presumptuous arrogance. Now, of course, having had time to analyse the situation form a more objective distance, I am glad that I refrained from this course of action, since in a sense he was perfectly right; my position at the Brotherhood was untenable. I represented just about everything of which the Children of Light disapproved. The only way in which I would have been able to research the group as an insider would have been to have concealed my identity and activities--which would hardly have been ethical. I can thus see no solution to the dilemma. I left the Brotherhood on Saturday morning, and have had no dealings with any of the persons associated with it since. This lack of communication is not because I am angry or upset with the Children of Light. I simply doubt that we would have much to talk about were we to meet now.

CONCLUSION

When I first decided to do research on the Children of Light, I wished to discover how adherents of what is usually considered to be a universalist creed could set themselves off as absolutely distinct from all other persons; e.g., what mechanisms they employed for this purpose and how they reconciled this dichotomy with the tenets of their faith. Much of the research for answers to these questions took the form of observation and informal interviewing. However, it was only after I became a participant in the community--or tried to--that I could make any sense of the information acquired by other means. And it was only after I understood that I was dealing with a sect, rather than merely a religious ideology, that I could begin to describe what bearing the belief system of the Children of Light had on the all-important difference between insiders and outsiders.

Almost every facet of the daily life of residents of the Brotherhood serves at least a secondary function of setting the Children of Light off as different from all others: dress, social organization, demeanor, speech patterns, interpersonal interaction. To be different is probably not a conscious goal of residents of the community, but it is nonetheless a very central concern of the group. While this may come as real surprise to outsiders, since it is contrary to statements the Children of Light make about themselves, it is a common characteristic of sects. It was revelation to me to discover that the Brotherhood was

not at all unusual in this respect.

I think now that perhaps the most important statement I could make about the Children of Light is that they are sectarians. Not merely persons holding deep religious beliefs, but persons who have put those beliefs first. Sectarianism offers both a reason for being different and a framework for accomplishing it--all unconscious. A resident of the Brotherhood sees him/herself merely as living the true life. All of what the Child of Light is or does can ideally be explained in terms of the group's ideology, which members see as the correct interpretation of much-misunderstood scriptures. By contrast, outsiders who do not share this interpretation must be viewed as foreign elements, and boundaries raised between them and the true believers. Those few persons who claim to share the belief system of the community but reject its lifestyle can only be viewed suspiciously, as impossible anomalies. Thus the sectarian nature of the ideology can be used to explain or at least to clarify all the other aspects of the Brotherhood which I observed. In a sense, it is a story that the Children of Light tell themselves about themselves: "This is what we do. This is what we believe. And <u>that</u> is why we do it."

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