***The Endtime Family: Children of God*, by William Sims Bainbridge. State University of New York Press. 2002, 218 pp., Hb. \$71.50, ISBN-13: 9780791452639; Pb. \$25.95, ISBN-13: 9780791452646.**

Reviewed by Audhild Skoglund, Norway, audhild.skoglund@gmail.com

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How is one to understand a controversial new religious movement and the opposition it provokes in the general public? Bainbridge uses comparative analysis to investigate how members of The Family differ from the general public. A questionnaire based on items from the US General Social Survey was filled out by over a thousand members of this religious group and compared to results from the general American public, which reveals many interesting differences and similarities. In addition he has done extensive interviewing and observation in different Family homes, and draws on Family theology and comparisons with other religious groups.

The data created by Bainbridge is impressive and very concrete, which makes it a tremendous resource for anyone interested in learning about this particular group, or striving to understand the general field of conflict between a religious minority and the greater society.

The book is divided into an introduction, seven chapters and a conclusion. The different chapters deal with “Persecution,” “Survey,” “Beliefs,” “Practices,” “Alienation,” “Sexuality” and “Children.” The first two describe different government raids against the group and the basics of the data upon which the book is based.

As many authors do, Bainbridge starts his book by describing the controversy surrounding The Family International, and the persecution endured by the group. Most of the descriptions of the different raids in different parts of the world seem to be built on interviews with members, but this, unfortunately, is a bit unclear. These descriptions also seem to be grounded on the assumption that the group has been a victim of unfair attacks. This is unproblematic when the goal is to describe from within, but many would object to some phrases that seem to be part of the author’s own opinion, such as : “The authorities were already suspicious of any form of unconventional religion, so they were quite ready to believe wild claims about sexual abuse” (10). Were these claims really so “wild”? As Chancellor had already clearly documented in his book, *Life in the Family: An Oral History of The Children of God*, published two years earlier—a book which Bainbridge wrote the foreword to—sexual activity between adults and minors existed within

the community and was theologically approved of, though not practiced by everyone and probably not in all homes. As the memo ruling out adult-child sexual relations within the group was not released until 1986, with literature encouraging such practices circulating at least for another year, worries about these practices would not be totally without foundation by 1989. Still, it is interesting reading the stories of the children and adults who experienced the raids and how they look back on these experiences years later. Bainbridge also tells about how Australian authorities in 1992 “assaulted six Family Homes” (11), and in one case writes that “The youngsters refused to submit to interrogation unless Family adults were present” (13). Such statements are clearly one-sided, and one would wish to hear some reflections on the part of the author. On the other hand, the tale of the many raids brought forward by Bainbridge also reveal the experience of abusive behavior in the hands of authorities that clearly should be taken into account by officials involved in such raids against religious minorities. The FLDS raid in April 2008 also comes to mind as a recent example.

The main part of the book consists of results from Bainbridge’s own questionnaire compared to the General Survey. Here Bainbridge presents rich and interesting material. With respect to the demographics data, The Family reveals itself as quite different from the rest of the nation, with half of the respondents living in homes with 15 or more inhabitants. He also has interesting data on the age of members, on age when recruited, and on migration. In addition to the statistics of the survey data, Bainbridge has done a fair amount of in-depth interviews with members. The questionnaire also contained a number of open-ended questions that allowed members to provide more personalized data. These two latter sources of information he uses throughout the book. This serves two purposes: On the one hand he avoids the dryness of a purely statistical analysis, on the other quotes from these sources deepens one’s understanding of the statistical findings.

One interesting feature in the analysis is how the members of The Family International react negatively to the term “religious” in the questionnaire, which makes it difficult to ask some of the questions from the General Survey and obtain good answers. This is a problem that clearly will be the case with other religious groups and movements as well, and that should be taken into account when asking general questions about belief. In this and many related problematic areas Bainbridge’s excellent analyses would be useful to anyone studying religious belief and practice.

Some results are surprising, and challenge the view of The Family International as a fundamentalist organization. For example, half of the respondents

think that although the Bible is the inspired word of God, not everything should be taken literally, word for word. The answers to such theological questions also demonstrate that individual members have different views, which is of course no surprise to any scholar of religious studies, but often is not expected by NRM critics or by the general public. Still, members of The Family International are clearly at the far right of the spectrum of Christian groups in terms of such questions as the belief in the Devil, Heaven and Hell and the afterlife. Bainbridge also provides comparative quantitative data from other congregations, as well as from the general public. There is a clear strength to understanding the peculiarity of this group as compared to others.

For the most part the analyses provided by Bainbridge are interesting and shed light on the different answers to the questionnaire. He draws on a wide-ranging knowledge about Family theology and history, and puts these findings into a context that help to demonstrate not just what they believe and how they practice, but also why.

Unfortunately, there are a few passages that seem more ideologically than scientifically motivated. In chapter 7, which focuses on "Children," he starts with statistics about how many children each person has in The Family, compared to the general population (40.3 % in the former group have 7 or more, compared to 2.2 % for the general population). He then spends most of this section arguing how "The educated classes in postindustrial societies smugly prattle about population explosion and the need to limit fertility. But their own numbers are collapsing, not exploding" (143) and "The Family resists this trend, and one reason for examining its revolutionary lifestyle is the possibility that we can learn lessons about how to prevent the populations of postindustrial societies from collapsing" (144). Academically, I find it hard to see that learning how to live should be a purpose of studying how others live, unless one is on a mission to save the world. Also, as an analysis of societal healthy child-birth rates, the passage is weak: Does Bainbridge think we should all move into communes and have as many children as we possibly can?

Additionally, there are some annoying mistakes in the text, such as: "Of the 669 females under age 20 among the Shakers in 1860, fully 59 percent had vanished by 1860" (162). And one can find other examples of bad proof reading.

The Family International is a religious group that has shown a stunning ability to change over the years. Therefore it will be difficult to know to what degree the results from ten years ago apply to members today. Still, as Bainbridge points out in his introduction, tension between a religious group and the rest of society is to a high degree based on the fact that the group dif-

fers from the socio-cultural standard. The two will be mutually antagonistic towards one another based on ideas and practices that collide. Understanding what fuels this mechanism will be just as important today as some years ago, and, for the general purpose of studying the relationship between society and minority groups, the data is generous. The Family International is a community that has been constantly at odds with society in countries all over the world, and not much has changed in this regard. As experience of opposition to the group has shown, most opponents also base their view on things that might have happened some time ago, so “old” data probably will be just as accurate if the goal is to understand the group’s particular place in society as vilified and as an exemplar of what is regarded as a “dangerous cult.” It will also be possible in many instances to compare data in the questionnaire with national data from other countries, which makes the book all the more relevant. Being from Norway, I can easily see how the US general data differs from Norwegian data in matters such as belief in God and the literal truth of the Bible, and on practices such as spanking children, which is much more accepted both within the US and within The Family than in Norway. This makes it all the more interesting to compare data from this group with national statistical data when analyzing the conflict between the group and society at large.

All in all, Bainbridge has delivered a work that is highly relevant even years after its publication. It does not touch upon some of the more controversial aspects within the group, such as sexual relations with children, and I also miss reflections about sparse education and the opportunities for defectors when Bainbridge discusses the group’s hopes of keeping the second generation. But the data is rich, and it shows where the group differs from the general public, and where it doesn’t. For this purpose it would not have been satisfying just to study the practices and the theology of the group. As this study clearly shows, people differ in their opinions and practices even within a high-demand society. They are not brainwashed.