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# Rebooting The Family

An Analysis of Members' Feelings about Organizational  
Change in a New Religious Movement

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# Abstract

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**Problem/Background:** The Family International is a Christian new religious movement founded in 1968. The movement has a history of frequent organizational changes, partly due to its theologically founded belief in continuous prophecy. The latest organizational change, the Reboot, was implemented in September 2010.

**Purpose:** This paper aims to introduce the Reboot and show how changes in social boundaries are perceived by members of The Family International. This will be achieved by case studies of material derived from text documents, questionnaires and in-depth interviews analyzed through William Paden's phenomenological theory of religious worlds and systems of purity.

**Conclusion:** Most members seem content with the changes. The Family has been a movement with very strict social boundaries. The loosening of them now seem at once to be motivated by the interaction with secular worlds in the form of secular institutions and the second generations demand for less tension with society at large.

**Key words:** new religious movement, The Family International, The Reboot, religious world, system of purity, organizational change

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# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Background

As a student of both sociology and comparative religion, I have taken a great interest in new religious movements<sup>1</sup> and alternative spirituality. In 2009 I wrote my bachelors paper in sociology on the socialization of children in ISKCON<sup>2</sup> and in 2010 my Bachelor's paper in comparative religion concerning the influence of anti-cult movements<sup>3</sup> on Sweden's response to new religious movements. As I hope to be able to carry out extensive research on new religions in the future, I try to keep up with news in this particular research field. In November 2009 I attended an INFORM<sup>4</sup> seminar dealing with the topic of prophecy within new religious movements. Among the participants of this seminar were some members of The Family International<sup>5</sup> with whom I had talked on some earlier occasions as they had helped me find information on the movement for an essay on children's music within the group I had written during my undergraduate studies. Since they knew I took an interest in the group they had made it a routine to briefly update me on the group's activities when we met at these seminars. This time they gave me two copies of talks their religious leaders had given at another conference addressing changes within the movement. They offered to send me more information if I was interested, which I gratefully accepted. When the paper arrived I read it through but, as I was deeply involved in another study at that time, I put it in a drawer to reread on another occasion. As part of keeping up with and learning more about various movements I often visit the websites of different movements as well as some ex-members forums. In May 2010 I was made aware via such a forum that major changes were taking

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<sup>1</sup> I will use the term new religious movement (NRM) in an effort to avoid the negative connotations of the words sect or cult. For a discussion on the concept of new religious movements see Frisk (1998).

<sup>2</sup> International Society for Krishna Consciousness: [www.iskcon.org](http://www.iskcon.org) (accessed 12/3/2010).

<sup>3</sup> Anti-cult movement is a term used to describe organizations of former members and families of members of new religious movements who are generally negative toward the movement. For a discussion on anti-cult movements see Shupe and Bromley (1994).

<sup>4</sup> INFORM (Information Network Focus on Religious Movements) <http://www.inform.ac/> (accessed 12/3/2010).

<sup>5</sup> Former Children of God: <http://www.thefamily.org/en/> (accessed 12/3/2010).

place in the group.<sup>6</sup> I opened the drawer and reread the paper I had been sent, realizing that the transformations taking place at the very moment I was reading might well alter the whole organization and thus the future for its members in a profound way. I felt curious, wanted to know more about these changes and started looking for more information. The results of that curiosity are presented in this paper.

## 1.2 Problem discussion

The Family International (TFI) is a religious movement that emerged in the late 1960s. It was founded by a man named David Berg (1919–1994), who later came to be perceived by adherents as the End-Time Prophet. The movement is based on Christian theology but has never had more than a couple of thousand followers. It has, however, made itself internationally famous through a radical interpretation of the Bible and critique of mainstream society. The Family has gotten particular attention in the media partly due to its liberal views on sexuality.<sup>7</sup> The group is well known within the research field of sociology of religion and new religious movements, and has been extensively studied as a “high-tension” group<sup>8</sup> that has limited and regulated contact with mainstream society. Although there are some excellent in-depth case studies<sup>9</sup> on the group, it is constantly changing due to its theological basis being continuous prophecy. This means that the group’s doctrines and praxis have changed a lot over the course of its 40-year history. This essay aims to examine the latest change in The Family International called The Reboot, which was implemented in September 2010, in order to get a clearer picture of what constitutes this change and what, especially in terms of relaxing social boundaries, it means to members in their day-to-day life.

## 1.3 Purpose of the study

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<sup>6</sup> [http://www.xfamily.org/index.php/Reboot\\_Documents](http://www.xfamily.org/index.php/Reboot_Documents) (accessed 12/3/2010).

<sup>7</sup> See Rick Ross: <http://www.rickross.com/groups/family.html> (accessed 9/29/2010).

<sup>8</sup> High-tension refers to Stark and Bainbridge’s definition: “Tension is equivalent to broad subcultural deviance. The high-tension group is *different* from the socio-cultural standard, mutually *antagonistic* toward the dominant groups that set the standard, and socially *separate* from them” (Stark & Bainbridge, 1987, p. 122).

<sup>9</sup> See the section Earlier Research.

This essay aims to show how changes in social boundaries due to the implementation of the Reboot are perceived by members of The Family International by asking the following research questions:

- What is the Reboot?
- How do members feel about the alternations concerning social boundaries that the Reboot suggests?

## 1.4 Outline

The body of this paper consists of four main sections. The second chapter introduces the theoretical framework; William Paden's theory of religious worlds and some of the theory's key concepts. It also motivates the use of the theory and circles the sociological research front of new religious movements. The third chapter presents the case study method and the data collection methods employed. The fourth chapter describes The Family International through a historical review. The fifth chapter presents the empirical data and analyzes it through the theoretical framework. The last chapter discusses the conclusions derived from the data, discusses the shortcomings of the paper and suggests some topics for further research.

## 2 Theoretical frame of reference

### 2.1 William E. Paden's phenomenological theory of religious worlds

#### 2.1.1 Motive for using Paden's theory

Although William E. Paden's book *Religious Worlds: The Comparative Study of Religion* does not describe a strictly sociological framework for understanding religious phenomena, his concept of religious worlds is partly built on earlier sociological (as well as philosophical) theory in the tradition of phenomenology and he uses much of Berger and Luckmann's social constructionist theory of knowledge (1967) as a basis for his theory. One might argue that a sociologically oriented paper should use sociological theory and there is some well established sociological work on the concept of life-worlds. Despite this, I find Paden's application of the concept of life-world on the religious context more helpful in this study, as it puts religious orientation and experience in focus. The categories outlined in the book explicitly deal with phenomena in the religious context. Paden's book outlines the method of comparison and argues why this particular method is preferable to others.

Paden argues that the phenomenological approach to religion should be one free of judgements on whether a transcendent reality exists as an objective reality or not. He strongly objects ideological comparison which he sees as serving only as a way of authorizing a personally held standpoint. The comparative study of religion from a phenomenological perspective has no room for ethnocentrism or metaphysical interpretations. The use of Paden's theory instead of a strictly sociological one in this paper rests on the assumption that religious worlds has something that other worlds lack; namely the all-pervading understanding of a sacred reality (Paden, 1994, pp. 35-49). Paden himself argues that the "concept of world is a unifying conceptual framework for integrating the otherwise disparate contributions of many social science disciplines" (Paden, 1994, p. 57). I think that is in line with the aim of this paper.



### 2.1.2 Religious worlds

Paden's working premise is that the term religion is to be understood as a "system of language and practice that organizes the world in terms of what is deemed sacred" (Paden, 1994, p. 10). He further underlines the importance of recognizing the existence of plural worlds rather than one objectively existing world. Building on Peter Berger's<sup>10</sup> definition of the relationship between world and religion, he states that world as a conceptual category therefore serves to encompass not only the belief and practice of the inhabitants of a specific world but rather the whole scope of phenomena that constitute what inhabitants perceive of as reality. Worlds cannot be reduced to mere belief systems but should rather be understood as "matrices of action, ways of inhabiting a world" (Paden, 1994, p. 7). Paden also stresses the importance of recognizing that though the various worlds that people inhabit may differ, world building is something that all humans partake in. He alerts the reader to this fact by pointing out that intersubjective understanding is also present in the researcher, as he/she is also an inhabitant of a particular world. To understand religious worlds one must understand that "the sacred and the real is correlative" (Paden, 1994, p. 54) to the inhabitant and that while the content of a specific religion differs from others, the form can be captured in categories such as myth and ritual common to many traditions. The creation and re-creation by individuals and social institutions of these categories structure the religious world. Paden stresses the sociologically important notion of the socialization process, which is constantly reinforced by the collective occupying the religious world. Religious worlds typically reflect the worlds they emerge in (Paden, 1994, p. 55).

Paden illustrates how religious worlds exist alongside other worlds, religious as well as secular. The religious world is constantly shaping and re-shaping itself in relation to these other worlds, thus continually negotiating social boundaries on individual as well as collective levels. Through the creation and acceptance of myths, symbols and language a religion declares what it is and at the same time establishes what it is not. The taxonomic system establishes the dynamics of the religious world, which are ever-changing. Paden points particularly to language as significant in how reality is organized, and states that: "the way one explains the world is itself a linguistic manifestation of the kind of world in which the explainer dwells" (Paden, 1994, p. 58). Religious language creates certain phenomena and

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<sup>10</sup> See Peter Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a sociological Theory of Religion* (1990)

leaves out others. It helps sustain or reshape myths which in turn guide moral behaviour. Religions can be seen as “communities of memory” (Paden, 1994, p. 78) where a sacred attitude towards myths and mythic expressions legitimizes them as myths (Paden, 1994, p. 79). Another important point that he makes on the notion of religious worlds is that the concept is holistic, encompassing all areas of life for the inhabitants of the world. It is by no means reducible to philosophical speculation or analyses of doctrine or belief only; rather, it includes social and psychological actions as well as material phenomena, such as hairstyles and music, food and icons (Paden, 1994, p. 57).

### 2.1.3 Dealing with crisis in a religious world

Particularly applicable to this paper is Paden’s description of how religious worlds deal with crises. By explanation and/or interpretation negative events are rationalized and given meaning. Crises may arise from within a world but are inevitably located in clashes with competing worlds involving alternative authorities (Paden, 1994, p. 61). Modernity is one such competing world that has engendered various responses in religions. Paden describes four typical religious responses to secularization and social change:

1. A possible response is for the religion to turn conservative and defend its boundaries by retreating and reinforcing a fundamentalist stance which has no room for relativistic interpretations.
2. Another possibility is to turn liberal, accommodate the new values and incorporate them to some extent without totally letting go of the original value system. Paden illustrates how the mix of secular styles and traditional symbols sometimes becomes inconspicuous by the example of Christmas and Easter.
3. The third possible response of a religion facing social change is to break with the old and start new. When the old tradition is hopelessly anachronistic a new interpretation of the old is a possible response to the crisis. Paden gives the example of new religious movements, which is pertinent to the scope of this paper. These are rarely based on fundamentally new ideas but typically evolve out of dissatisfaction with the original system, which has lost authority. New religions are new in the sense that they reconstruct a new system in adaptation to a new culture or environment, and they most often contain elements that have been lacking in a specific setting. Revitalization is the key concept here: by revitalizing an old myth a fresh understanding of it gives life to the new world built on old, reinterpreted truths.

4. The fourth and last possible response is individualism. Paden writes that this response is now so frequent in our society that we almost fail to make it a part of the religious studies field. Individualist response constitutes a self-styled religion that is privatized to the extent of being conspicuous (Paden, 1994, pp. 63-64).

He stresses that although comparison between different religious systems is useful, this can be limited to an analysis of variations within a specific world (Paden, 1994, p. 4).

#### 2.1.4 Systems of purity

Paden elaborates on some useful categories for comparison: myth, ritual, time and gods. For this paper his conceptual category *systems of purity* is most useful. Systems of purity refer to the dichotomous world of religion and serve to divide actions and phenomena into manageable categories such as pure/ impure, good/bad, holy/sinful etc. The very basis of this category's existence is its opposing category, impurity. The one cannot exist without the other. Systems of purity can be seen as matrices of moral norms that imply how negativity is handled within a particular world. Paden defines purity as a category which has no intrinsic meaning other than that the phenomenon or action constituting the pure is not mixed. Relating the term pure to its dictionary meaning he writes that it means something that is "free from mixture or contact with that which weakens, impairs, or pollutes; containing no foreign or vitiating material" (Paden, 1994, p. 142). He warns us not to interpret purity in simplified Western terms alerting us to the pitfalls of seeing it as, for instance, chastity. In some traditions sexuality is a way of worship and a path to salvation; what is pure varies a lot between different religious worlds. Paden writes that "social order is often the infrastructure of religious order" (Paden, 1994, p. 144). The difference between right and wrong can in some cases be hierarchically imposed which may mean that it is enforced upon adherents by threat of supernatural punishment (Paden, 1994, p. 143). He relates how religious order is manifested in social life, exemplifying the exclusivity and boundary setting principles of dietary prescriptions in Judaism and Hinduism as identity markers and coded statements (Paden, 1994, p. 144). To adherents purity rules manifests the consistency they advocate. Paden likens the individual to a battlefield where a contest between the pure and the profane is continuously waged (Paden, 1994, p. 146). He further identifies three typical ways religions deal with negativity:

1. Avoidance of profanity. Profanity is to be avoided within all religious systems. What constitutes profanity varies, but is often defined in some form of a religious law (or tradition)

and is legitimized as prohibited. The foremost reason for avoiding profanity is to keep the system intact.

2. Purification. This category refers to the way religion handles profanity when it is already present and thus impossible to avoid. Purification of profanation can be achieved by, for instance, punishment, ritual combat, shunning, or the use of scapegoats (Paden, 1994, p. 154). Sacrifices of various kinds, and sometimes other forms of suffering, often play an important role in the purification process.
3. Transcending the purity/profanity opposition. In some religious worlds the utmost goal is to overcome purity and profanity altogether in favor of a higher reality. This can sometimes be manifested in an effort at unification of the dichotomous holy and evil categories, and sometimes in an acceptance of profanity or impurity.

Finally, Paden writes that the polarity of sacred and profane is not monolithic but complex, identifying it as positional and “relative to social and religious location” (Paden, 1994, p. 158). Here again he stresses the importance of comparison and attention to tensions within a religious world as opposed to between religious worlds.

In this paper the phenomenological framework, paired with Paden’s notion of religious worlds, will serve as the basis for the analysis of how the changes in social boundaries are perceived of by members of the religious group.

## 2.2 Earlier research on New Religious Movements

There are numerous attempts to classify the phenomena popularly known as sects. In this section I will give a brief background to the research field and explain the term new religious movement and some of the topics research in the field has focused on.

### 2.2.1 The emergence of a research field

Max Weber’s now classical essay *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* marks the beginning of a differentiation between sect and church. Weber argued that a church is something an individual is born into while a sect is something one converts to. Another difference is that the church is inclusive, the sect exclusive (Weber, 1958; 2003, s. 142). Building on Weber’s church-sect typology Ernst Troeltsch (1865-1923) added the term mysticism (Troeltsch, 1992, pp. 730-731) which was later developed into the term cult (Frisk,

2007, p. 192). Denomination is a term introduced by Richard Niebuhr (1894-1962) which signifies an organizational form that is inclusive and pluralistic but has no intentions to influence society (Frisk, 2007, pp. 192-193). These four concepts; church, sect, denomination and cult are the basis for the later development of the research field.

### 2.2.2 Classification models

Roy Wallis (1944-1990) has classified new religious movements into three categories according to the degree to which the movements accept the larger society in which it is operating:

1. World-rejecting new religion is opposed to society as it sees the present social order as a manifestation of humanity turning away from God's plan. World-rejecting movements (such as the Family, Unification Church and ISKCON) anticipate an impending change of events such as the second coming. These movements reject secular institutions and are generally easily distinguishable. They claim to hold the truth and generally sprung from the counter-culture (Wallis, 2003, pp. 36-44).
2. World-affirming new religions can be seen as the direct opposite of world-rejecting new religions. Though they claim to hold the truth, they are typically accepting towards society and often involve techniques but might lack a fully developed theology (such as Transcendental Meditation and Silva Mind Control). These movements aim at individual development and sprung out of a capitalistic society (Wallis, 2003, pp. 44-54).
3. World-accommodating new religion is very tolerant towards other religions and society. Religion in these cases constitutes a part of the individual's world rather than the world itself which is what differentiates it from the other two categories. Neo-Pentecostalism is an example of a world-accommodating new religion (Wallis, 2003, pp. 54-56)

Besides Wallis' model several attempts at models have been made. Most notable are Bryan Wilson's 7 criteria for a classification of a sect which are based on the movements response to society and revolves around the ways in which salvation is reached (Wilson, *Religious Sects*, 1970, pp. 36-47) and Stark & Bainbridge's three category model of cults comprising;

1. audience cults: loosely organized movements
2. client cults: more organized than audience cults
3. cult movements; significant of cult movements is that they demand total engagement and stand in a high-tension relationship with society (Stark & Bainbridge, 1985, pp. 26-29).

### 2.2.3 The influence of the anti-cult movement

The emergence of the first anti-cult movement in 1971 was formed in response to the activities of the Children of God. The organized resistance soon reached global heights and came to greatly influence much of the research on new religious movements. The anti-cult movement consisted of defectors and parents of members of controversial new religions who opposed the groups. Their aim was to expose the groups and prove that they were no real religions. The anti-cult movement has advocated such terms as brainwashing and mind control. The media has played a significant role in backing up the anti-cult movements presentations of reality of new religion. The term new religious movements is used in favour of the more pejorative term sect in an effort to neutralize the debate following the controversies (Barker, 2003, pp. 15-17). The result of the lobbying from anti-cult movements has in many cases led to governmental reports on new religious movements which, in some countries such as France and Belgium, have led to severe restraint on the movements activities. A fair amount of research has been dedicated at presenting a scholarly view of the field (Introvigne, 2004, pp. 151-177). Another result of this controversy was that some movements, such as The Family, began inviting scholars to investigate them. The Family had experienced the effects of the controversy when children in several of the group's homes were removed by officials due to accusations based on former member's stories. A result of the raids and the groups plead to the scientific community resulted in the anthology *Sex, Slander and Salvation* where 17 authors presented research on the Family (Lewis, 1994, pp. 3-11).

### 2.2.4 The Future of New Religions

Some of the research deals with the future of new religious movements. Rodney Stark identifies 10 points which he means are essential to whether a new religious movement can survive beyond the first generation. The most important criteria is that the movement can sustain a medium level of tension in relation to the surrounding society, that leadership is able to make members feel part of the system of authority, that they operate in an area where local religion is weak, that there are strong social ties but at the same time openness towards outsiders, that they stay strict enough and that they socialize the second and third generation in a way that minimizes defection. The second and third generations of new religious movements will naturally want to reduce strictness. Rodney Stark writes that if this results in

weakened boundaries, “the retention of offspring is not favourable to continued growth” (Stark, 2003, pp. 259-268).

Concerning the future of The Family William S. Bainbridge identifies six factors that may hinder the group’s growth:

loss of the original constituency because of historical change, excessive tension with the surrounding sociocultural environment, isolation from networks of potential recruits because of social implosion, a lifestyle that often distracts members from missionary works, emphasis on fertility rather than recruitment for the production of new members, and a belief system that fails to emphasize recruitment (Bainbridge, 2002, p. 172).

Bainbridge suggests that alternative explanations may be employed but the six factors above present the result of his study.

The earlier research on new religious movements and its key concepts will be used in the analysis to circle the changes within The Family International in relation to the groups organizational structure.

## 3 Method

### 3.1 Case study: A qualitative approach

Using case studies as a research strategy implies that the researcher can use a variety of sources and methods by so-called method triangulation (Merriam, 1994, p. 85). A case study focuses on one or a few units that are examined thoroughly. Case studies are often holistic in the sense that they illuminate a phenomenon from several perspectives simultaneously. Merriam compiled the results of five researchers' definitions of such studies and came up with four main features. A case study is particularistic, descriptive, heuristic and inductive (Merriam, 1994, pp. 26-27, 33).

### 3.2 Data collection method

#### 3.2.1 Documents

To get a clearer picture of what the Reboot entails, I have read the total sum of documents comprising "the Reboot Package" in the version sent to me by members at the Family Europe information desk. It encompasses 17 sets of documents dealing with different topics connected to the Reboot. Merriam writes that the researcher has to consider the documents' authenticity (Merriam, 1994, p. 128). It is my impression that the documents enclosed are the same as those given to Family members.<sup>11</sup> I have also used the copies of Karen Zerby's and Steve Kelly's presentations at the 2009 CESNUR conference along with the paper "The Future of the Family International: Establishing a Culture of Innovation and Progress", written by Zerby and Kelly and sent to me in 2009. Besides these documents, I was sent two personal stories, previously posted on a members' only website, and one account in the form of a personal letter sent to me by e-mail.

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<sup>11</sup> I believe these are identical to those presented to Activated Members, since the same documents were presented on the AM-site, which has now shut down.



### 3.2.2 Questionnaire

My aim was to interview 10 members of TFI, however, there were initially some difficulties finding members who were willing and had the time for an interview. Two different members, whom I had asked to help me find informants, asked me and/or suggested that some form of written list of questions might help as some members had had negative experiences with journalists and wanted to have time to think (and pray) about the questions. I compiled a two-page web questionnaire consisting of two parts. The first part deals with demographic questions concerning, age, gender, location, education and work, marital status, children, children's education and previous membership level. The second part focuses on the Reboot changes. This part is divided into eight themes; membership, secular schooling, secular jobs, Family culture, lifestyle, non-members, terminology and tithing. For each theme the overall question is what the informant feels in relation to the changes in this particular area. There are five options in a drop-down menu, ranging from "very good" to "bad". After each theme, there is space for an extended answer, where informants can give their personal view on the specific theme. 12 informants answered the questionnaire. They could also choose to write in a separate document if they wished to elaborate on a specific topic. In the email accompanying the questionnaire, members were invited to participate in an interview, which 8 members subsequently did. The results of the first part of the questionnaire are not statistically presented for three main reasons. The first is that The Family has relatively few members and the questionnaire asks questions about birth country, age, gender and whereabouts which, paired with the low numbers of informants participating, makes the identification of individual members fairly easy within the group. The second reason is that the result has little value for the aim of this paper as the main purpose is to study attitudes rather than demographics. The third reason is that the questionnaire itself was not sufficiently reliable which resulted in misinterpretations. However, it did serve the paper, because several members wrote personal reflections and notes.

### 3.2.3 Qualitative interviews

Qualitative interviews usually have a very low degree of standardization, which means that the answers to the questions are not designed and provided by the interviewer. This mode gives the interviewee a greater amount of freedom to focus on what he/she would like to emphasize as important in his/her answer to a question. The qualitative interview thus offers

an inductive approach (Patel & Davidsson, 2003, p. 78). I have used semi-structured interviews based on the questionnaire presented above. In a semi-structured interview situation the informant can choose to elaborate more freely on a specific topic. This also allows the interviewer a greater amount of flexibility, and makes it easier for him/her to follow up on specific topics emphasized by the informant (Denscombe, 2000, p. 135). 8 members were interviewed; 7 via Skype or telephone and one in person.

### 3.2.4 Selection

An adequate and appropriate selection aims at increasing understanding of the studied phenomenon. It is non-probabilistic. Merriam writes that the goal of qualitative research is not to generate statistical and generalizable results (Merriam, 1994, p. 61). Informants for this study were selected in accordance with the principle for selection based on personal knowledge and to some extent on network selection (Merriam, 1994, p. 63). I initially contacted two individuals who helped me get in touch with members interested in participating. My initial aim was to get a broad selection of members living on different continents and belonging to different age groups. During the data collection period I gave up this aim and collected the data available.

## 3.3 Data analysis procedure

In case studies the collected data is preferably analyzed both during and after the collection period (Merriam, 1994, p. 136). The interviews were continuously logged according to the principles for logging interviews presented by Merriam, which at the same time is a first review of the interview since the method involves noting the researcher's thoughts and associations to the informant's answers (Merriam, 1994, pp. 98-99). The information derived from the standardized questions in the questionnaire was counted and registered but will, as mentioned above, not be presented. The information contained in personal letters and e-mails was categorized in an effort to find regularities and patterns in the material, as was the information derived from interviews. The categories were continuously compared with the previous material in an effort to structure the data intelligibly. The result is presented in narrative form in the empirical part of this paper.

### 3.3.1 Criticism of method triangulation

The benefits of using method triangulation have been that I have been able to use different kinds of data. It has been particularly beneficial to use personal e-mails as some of the informants were not comfortable with interviews. It also gave me a chance to pose follow-up questions as the study went along. The biggest problem with the study was how to get interested informants and how to form questions as I initially had little knowledge of what the Reboot was. Therefore the possibility to read the Reboot documents proved beneficial. Unfortunately, the task of putting together a questionnaire, interviewing informants and reading documents proved to be more time consuming than I had initially expected. It resulted in a poorly designed questionnaire which gave some clues as to what kind of questions would be adequate but it also took my focus of the interviews. Quite late into the work I realized that I should have included The Family's previous Charter documents, which I got access to at a very late point. A delimitation which would have been useful would have been to use only the documents to compare with each other, before going on with the interviews. The result of the method triangulation is that I have gotten information but that it has been hard to focus on the research question alone.

# 4 The Family International

## 4.1 A historical background

To understand the changes taking place in the group, a historical background is necessary. Below is a brief introduction to The Family's history.

### 4.1.1 1968–1975 The early years-forming the Children of God

The Family International is a movement that emerged from the so-called Jesus People Movement<sup>12</sup>. Coming from a Christian background founder David Berg<sup>13</sup> had worked as a minister but opposed the large churches and mainstream society which he labelled “the System”. He began preaching to dropouts in California and by 1968 he founded what was later to be known as the Children of God. Berg preached that the End of the world was drawing near and that repentance was the only way to escape God's wrath that would soon come. Members lived together in so-called homes sharing everything, provisioning for food and witnessing by distributing the groups tracts and products. The homes were large, with sometimes as many as 100 members living together. Soon the radical doctrines and practices of the group began to concern family members of Berg's followers. FREECOG (Free Our Sons and Daughters from the Children of God) was founded in 1972, was the first anti-cult movement and was created as a reaction by parents to their sons and a daughter adhering to Bergs prophesies (Chancellor, 2000, pp. 180-182).<sup>14</sup> By that time, Berg and his disciples had already left for Europe. Berg had remarried, leaving his former wife Jane Miller (Mother Eve) for his secretary Karen Zerby<sup>15</sup>. Membership numbers increased from around 100 to 1500

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<sup>12</sup> The Jesus People Movement consisted of Christian groups that emerged in the 1960s, many of whose members were hippies and dropouts. For a historical overview, see J. Gordon Melton “Anti-cultists in the United States: A Historical Perspective” in Wilson & Cresswell, *New Religious Movements: Challenge and Response* 1999, pp. 213–214.

<sup>13</sup> Berg has been known to members as: Moses David, Father David, Grandpa and Dad.

<sup>14</sup> For a discussion on FREECOG as the first anti-cult movement see “A Historical Perspective”, J. Gordon Melton in Wilson & Cresswell, *New Religious Movements: Challenge and response* 1999, p 215-220.

<sup>15</sup> Zerby has been known to members as: Maria, Mama Maria, Queen Maria and Maria Fontaine.

between 1969 and 1972. Communication between members and the leadership went from personal contact to communication via so-called MO-letters<sup>16</sup> only (Frisk, 1998, pp. 102-108). Berg and his family called themselves “The Royal Family” and had complete control of the organization (van Eck Duymaer van Twist, 2007, p. 112).

#### 4.1.2 1975–1978 The New Revolution-Introducing the Shepherds

In 1975 Berg announced “The New Revolution” which involved a series of organizational changes. As membership grew members were organized in religious communities. Leadership followed a hierarchical structure with leaders on different levels, called “shepherds”.<sup>17</sup> These were assigned to handle communication between the top leadership (Berg and his family) and ordinary members. The consequences of the reorganization were apparent by 1977, when reports of a severe abuse of power came to Berg’s attention constituting a crisis within the movement (Melton, 1997, p. 8).

#### 4.1.3 1978–1981 From the Children of God to the Family of Love

As a result of the power abuse under The New Revolution era, another major reorganization called “The Reorganization Nationalization Revolution” (RNR), was launched in 1978. Virtually all leaders (except those at the very top) were dismissed and new shepherds appointed. A new rule stated that a home was to consist of no more than 12 adults. This change led to a break-up; many of the homes became independent and in the end consisted of nuclear families. Many of these subsequently left the movement, while others left in anger at being removed from their leadership positions. Overall, the membership decreased significantly (Melton, 1997, pp. 1-9). Coinciding with the organizational changes—which can be seen as the disbanding of the old organization (The Children of God) and the formation of a new (The Family of Love)—was an increasingly radical view on sexuality within the movement. The “Law of Love” which is a fundamental theological cornerstone, was radically reinterpreted (Hammer, 2010, pp. 186-187). As one of the applications of the Law of Love, a practise called “sharing” was instituted. This meant that adult members of the same

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<sup>16</sup> MO Letters were mailings that Berg wrote on various topics concerning the Christian life and doctrines. After Bergs death in 1994 the mailings were called ML, Maria Letters written by his wife Karen Zerby (Maria).

<sup>17</sup> Shepherd was the term used for leaders of communities.

community had multiple partners (Melton, 1997, p. 9). Second-generation members (SGA), most of whom as adults left the movement, witnessed how some adults interpreted the radical views on sexuality as including children in this practise (van Eck Duymaer van Twist, 2007, p. 122).<sup>18</sup>

#### 4.1.4 1981-1987 Dealing with the second generation

In 1981a reorganization called “The Fellowship Revolution” was presented by leadership. This time leadership at local, district and national levels were appointed by members (Melton, 1997, pp. 9-10). The structure of the movement was tightened up as homes were again allowed more than 12 adult members; large homes were called combos. As a result of the liberal views on sexuality and Berg’s opposition to contraception numerous children were born into the movement, many of whom by the 1980s had reached adolescence. Schools were established to handle the growing population of youngsters. When a teenager was troublesome, a letter was sent to his/her parents explaining that the bad behavior of the youth posed a risk of the whole family being excluded (Chancellor, 2000, p. 15). During this decade, the practice of “Flirty Fishing” was established, which involved female members preaching and recruiting new members by engaging in sexual activities with them. This, as well as partner sharing between different homes, was stopped in the late 1980s when AIDS and other venereal diseases had ravaged the group (Chancellor, 2000, p. 117). In early 1980s a book called *The Davidito Book* was distributed among members. The book explores the childhood of Karen Zerby’s son, Davidito. Included were pictures of him engaged in seemingly sexual situations with his nanny. The book was withdrawn after a decree by the leadership in 1987 (van Eck Duymaer van Twist, 2007, p. 123). It is important because the explicit material contained in it contributed to the massive raids on the movement’s communities in several countries in the early 1990s.

#### 4.1.5 1987 The separation of members

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<sup>18</sup> The history of the sexual abuse of children is an important subject which is debated both within and outside the movement. I have, however, chosen not to focus on this topic in this paper. While this may be criticized I feel that I do not have sufficient facts to look deeper into the subject. It is not the focus of this particular paper. I know of only one recent paper dealing with this in a scientifically unbiased manner; Amanda van Eck Duymaer van Twists dissertation “Growing up in Contemporary Sectarian Movements. An Analysis of Segregated Socialization” (2007).

In late 1987, membership categories were outlined in an effort to separate members who had attained the standard for higher membership—DO (Disciples Only)—and TRF Supporter—(TSer), who gave tithes but were unable to fulfil membership requirements and were not allowed to read all publications. Being TSed was in reality equivalent to being kicked out (Chancellor, 2000, p. 25).

#### 4.1.6 1988-1994 The death of the charismatic leader and the persecutions

Berg had predicted that the Great Tribulation would occur in 1989 and that Jesus would return to Earth in 1993. Due to the upcoming events, the organization once again changed; for example TSers were now called Fellow Members. Berg had begun to retire from leadership in 1988, letting Maria take over more parts of the organization and produce MO-letters. By Maria's side was a member named Peter Amsterdam (Steve Kelley) emerged as new leader. When Berg passed away in 1994 Peter and Maria were married. Both channelled messages from the deceased Berg to the members (Chancellor, 2000, pp. 24-28). In 1989 there were more than 100 schools, but the fact that many of the teenagers who were sent there ended up leaving the movement due to harsh methods and abuse of power led to the closure of these schools in the early 1990s (Chancellor, 2000, pp. 19-21). During this decade criticism towards the group's methods, based on the alleged sexual misconduct with minors mentioned earlier, led to raids against several large communities. Children were separated from their parents and investigations of sexual abuse instigated. These actions have subsequently been criticized by scholars, as no evidence of such abuse was actually found (Richardson, 1999, pp. 172-186). The raids are an important part of the movement's history as they confirmed to members that the feeling of persecution they had was real.

#### 4.1.7 1995-2000 Introducing the Love Charter-straightening up the Family

In 1995 a document called "The Love Charter" was presented by World Services (WS)<sup>19</sup>. The document was formulated after the so-called "Ward-case"<sup>20</sup> and lists rights and

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<sup>19</sup> World Services is the leadership (together with Peter Amsterdam and Maria Fontaine) of the Family International handling the movements finances and publishing its literature.

responsibilities for members as well as core beliefs and values. The document was revised in 1998, 2009 and 2010.<sup>21</sup> The introduction of the Charter started a democratization process, making the homes more autonomous. Only full-time members, Charter Members (CM) lived in Family homes (Chancellor, 2000, p. 25). In 1996 the “Loving Jesus Revelation” a form of “erotic bridal mystique” was introduced (Frisk, 2007, p. 47).

#### 4.1.8 2000-2003 The Shake-Up 2000; last effort to get rid of free-riders

Before the millennium a document called “The Shake-Up 2000” was issued by the leadership. It presented a new strategy to tackle problems with SGAs, who were not so interested in partaking in the movement’s work. It also criticized some SGAs for drawing closer to mainstream society’s ideals regarding films, clothing, music, etc. The old opposition to the system took on a new momentum. Members had six months to decide if they wanted to live in homes with the responsibilities this entailed or if they wanted to leave. One option was to become Fellow Members instead (van Eck Duymaer van Twist, 2007, pp. 143-145). Those who stayed signed a contract (Frisk, 2007, p. 57).

#### 4.1.9 2001-2007 The board structure and expanded levels of membership

In 2001 a new measure called “The Board Structure” had come into effect. Six boards, consisting of members, each had responsibility for implementing policies in different areas, such as education, church outreach and PR.<sup>22</sup> The levels of membership consisted of Family Disciples (FD), being full-time members living in homes; Missionary Members (MM), part-time members; Fellow members (FM) paying tithes but not required to carry out missionary

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<sup>20</sup> The “Ward-case” was a custody battle where the grandmother of a child whose parents had been divorced and the mother was still in the group, sought sole custody of her grandchild. The case developed into an investigation of the whole group’s doctrines. The leadership distanced themselves from Berg’s teachings on children’s sexuality and agreed to Judge Ward’s demands (giving the child more educational options and assuring he would not be separated from his mother for more than two weeks at a time) (Bradney, 1999). The whole document is available at: <http://media2.xfamily.org/docs/legal/uk/ward-judgment/ward-judgment-scan-low.pdf> (accessed 9/23/2010).

<sup>21</sup> The latest version is accessible at <http://tficharter.com/en/charter/> (accessed 11/6/2010)

<sup>22</sup> The six boards governed: children and parenting, education, youth, church growth and outreach, communication and community relations, and coaching and shepherding <http://www.thefamily.org/en/about/structure-and-governance/> (accessed 11/6/2010).



work; Activated Members (AM), are neophytes who had begun an introductory course and General members (GM), people who financially supported the group or had taken an interest but were not otherwise active (Frisk, 2007, p. 57) (Shepherd & Shepherd, 2010, pp. 6-14).

#### 4.1.10 2008-2010 The change journey; towards the Reboot

In February 2008 the Family leadership launched a change that they called *The Offensive*. The document problematized the fact that the groups missionary efforts had, to some extent, been set aside because of its need to instead address various problems within the organization. It advocated that missionary work should be offensive, shifting the focus from inward to outward in order to reach more people with the Christian message (Amsterdam, A\_reboot\_Change Journey Manifesto, 2010). For the next two years the leadership reviewed the group's doctrines, lifestyle, culture and structure. In May 2010 the leadership presented members with the organizational and structural changes they called the Reboot. It contains 17 documents among a total of 172 pages, and a new version of the Family's Charter<sup>23</sup> which is substantially shortened, mainly due to the fact that all the rules governing life in the Family homes are gone. The Reboot documents outline a new policy for membership requirements and accountability, a statement of faith, a mission statement, policies regarding children and teenagers, an update of Family-specific terminology, and the application of the Law of Love.<sup>24</sup> It discusses the Family's historical background and gives an explanation to what preceded the changes, claiming that the group has been too focused on following the "old model", as laid out by the leaders in the early days which is now seen as limiting as the historical context in which the group operates has changed (Amsterdam, C\_reboot\_Backtracking Through TFI History, 2010) The overarching change that the reboot is aiming to institute is to relocate ultimate responsibility over member's lives from leadership to the individual members. This means abolishing a major part of the rules and regulations that have served to sustain the Family as a high-tension movement.

What impact the changes have on members' lives and how they are perceived by members will be presented below. This paper will not only provide a glimpse of the future of The Family International; it will also serve as a way of understanding the past through the eyes of the members.

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<sup>23</sup> <http://tficharter.com/en/> (accessed 11/24/2010)

<sup>24</sup> For a specified overview of the topics contained in the Reboot package, see Appendix A.

# 5 Empirical Findings and Analysis

## 5.1.1 Membership, status and tithing

*In our new Family, we will no longer have any divisions of membership. Instead, Family membership will encompass all current Family members (FD/MM/FM/AM) who wish to transition into the future Family.*<sup>25</sup> (Amsterdam, G\_Reboot Membership, 2010).

The requirement of members is that they should receive Jesus as their savior, have some knowledge of Family history (including persecution) and “unorthodox aspects” of the theology, be 18 or older<sup>26</sup> and complete a short reading course (Amsterdam, G\_Reboot Membership, 2010) . While mission work is desirable no control of how much time the individual spends on missionary work will be conducted. Adherence to core values and the statement of faith is a requirement though practice of every aspect of the doctrines is not required. Reporting monthly (online) is required of all members. Membership can be revoked if a member acts in a way that is damaging to other members or the organization as a whole (Amsterdam, G\_Reboot Membership, 2010). Children and teens are no longer considered members but “children of members” (Amsterdam, G\_Reboot Membership, 2010). Prior to the Reboot full-time members were required to tithe 10% of their income to World Services. Now, members can tithe or give a gift to other members mission work.

All but one of the informants had had the highest level of membership prior to the reboot. Although some informants initially stated that they had not had any major concerns on membership levels most members stated that they had come across judgemental attitudes connected to membership status in other people or had felt themselves judging others on the basis of membership level.

Joshua, an FGA and a father of 12, looks back and speaks of his great advocacy for home-schooling and the problems of finding good teachers:

My children did receive numerous training and good education via home schooling however, at some time, we were very much short on good teachers, I mean, well trained teachers who can teach and train kids

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<sup>25</sup> The document further states that GN, General Members, may also become Family members if they wish to, provided that they follow the new requirements for all members (Amsterdam, G\_Reboot Membership, 2010).

<sup>26</sup> Exceptions from this rule can be made for 16 and 17 year olds with their parent’s written permission (Amsterdam, G\_Reboot Membership, 2010).

.../ being able to use outside schools without worrying about your status is great .../ Some people thought becoming MM was synonymous with being demoted or stepping down from the top, including me, sad to say.

Asked if he would have sent some of his children to secular schools had he not had a fear of “stepping down” he replied:

Well, at least I would seek out opportunities and places which might meet the needs of my children.<sup>27</sup>

Dora, a 30 year old SGA explains how she avoided downgrading her membership in a 2 year period of absence from the Family. Having experienced excessive pressure and responsibility in a “tough” mission field she decided to not live in a Family home. Staying outside of the Family, not engaging in Family activities or contacting any of the group’s members she got a job and started clubbing on the weekends. Despite being virtually cut off from the group she set aside 10% of her income (as a tithe) and kept from taking drugs and dating, trying to uphold core rules of CM<sup>28</sup> membership. Asked if it would have been possible for her to step to a lower position instead of distancing herself from the group she answers:

Yes it would have been but at the time there were all these rules and when you left you it would mean you’d be FM, a weaker status. To rejoin you had to do your six months of probation and do an AIDS test, that was the last thing I wanted to do .../ I did not want my status to change, that’s why when I became a CM I could know in good conscience I didn’t need the blood test because I wasn’t sexually involved with other people.<sup>29</sup>

The examples show how membership requirements were perceived of as a manifestation of purity. It is evident from the Reboot documents that this was a widely spread understanding which is in line with Wallis’ categorization of The Family as a world-rejecting new religion. When the purity of the religious world was threatened by secular institutions and/or practises, both were avoided. Dora’s story could be seen as an example of how lifestyle rules sometimes distracted members from missionary work as Bainbridge pointed out 10 years ago (Bainbridge, 2002, p. 172).

Several members related membership and status to tithing. All members were positive to the changes regarding tithing. John, an older FGA, writes in his questionnaire:

My wife and I tithe to TFI and a number of people have requested to report with us, either giving us their tithe or a monthly gift to us (for use in our mission work). This reflects their desire to be connected to TFI and support our ministry .../ The option for supporting or contributing members has the potential to develop into church/fellowship groups under the TFI banner.<sup>30</sup>

Discussing membership categories he brings up the question of tithing again in the interview:

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<sup>27</sup> Joshua chat interview 10/28/2010.

<sup>28</sup> CM, Charter Member was the highest level of membership from the introduction of the first Charter in 1995.

<sup>29</sup> Dora telephone interview 11/11/2010.

<sup>30</sup> John questionnaire 19/23/2010

For me it's more of seeing who's made a commitment I suppose to the ongoing Family, the members of the Family, and who has decided not to continue /.../ You may or you may not be a member of the Family which means you're not tithing to The Family /.../ it's an interesting question: are people continuing to make a commitment towards the Family in way of supporting it and also in way of reaffirming their membership? <sup>31</sup>

The understanding that tithing is a reflection of people's commitment was expressed by some of the other informants as well; some referred to themselves as "tithing members". The quote reflects the present world-building that is going on in The Family; the negotiation of new boundaries. A mechanism for discerning *how dedicated* a member is will emerge. The quote suggests that the *degree* of commitment might be expressed in the amount of tithe and missionary work that a member gives. Tithing might be seen as the new expression of purity.

### 5.1.2 Secular education and secular employment

*The decision of where to educate your children-whether at home or in the public or private school system-is in your court as parents and has no bearing on membership status* (Amsterdam, H\_reboot Lifestyle, 2010).

The survey shows that most informants felt changes regarding education were either good or very good. The education of children is a question that several informants have elaborated on. Mark, a young SGA, feels he was lucky because his mother was a certified teacher and he got a good education:

Not all parents in the Family have what it takes to give their children a good education /.../ For others I know of, as hard as their parents tried, and they really did try, they didn't get the best education they could have. <sup>32</sup>

Carole, also a young SGA, feels her home schooling in the Family was good on the practical and vocational level but feels she has some "learning gaps" academically. Due to the Reboot she will work on them more actively, going back to her home country to study. Asked if she would not have done so had the Reboot not come about she says:

I definitely wouldn't have considered college necessary unless I was planning on leaving the TFI so yes, I am glad for the reboot on that account. <sup>33</sup>

Among FGAs with children still living at home three reported that their children have recently or will in the nearby future attend public or private school. In some areas home-schooling groups have formed for those still wishing to be home-schooled. As seen above, Joshua's family's membership affected his children's education. Daniel, an FGA, long-time member of

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<sup>31</sup> John telephone interview 10/26/2010.

<sup>32</sup> Mark telephone interview 11/3/2010.

<sup>33</sup> Carole chat interview 10/25/2010.

The Family and father of more than 8 children, experienced how his children's education affected the family's membership status:

Since we moved to Germany many years ago, [sic] through some of our 13 children wanting to pursue a secular career, we had to become MM since home schooling for the rest of the children in Germany is not officially allowed. With that we already started to live the lifestyle we basically live now and that was brought about by the reboot.<sup>34</sup>

Since we felt that the Lord wanted us to be in Germany, my wife and me being German nationals, we also felt, that our children going to German school was part of His plan for us at the time and so everything that that entailed /.../ I feel that it was good that the children visited and are still visiting public school as many of them pursue secular jobs in the end and even though maybe want to become missionaries they have a choice also to do other things<sup>35</sup>

Most informants felt that the education of children should be the parents' decision. Only one informant, Paul, an FGA of 60 and father of 3 children felt that changes regarding education were "not so good":

If folks begin sending their kids to secular schools because they are now too busy with secular jobs, and the children are not properly overseen and monitored as to how secular school might be affecting them negatively, it could end up that the negative attitudes that enter in will destroy much of the good that has been born during the children's earlier years when they were raised in Christian communal home-schooled situations.<sup>36</sup>

Paul's concerns regarding secular education were not expressed by other respondents but a similar concern for the third generation was expressed by Carole in connection to culture as we shall see in the next section. The changes regarding secular jobs are closely related to secular education. Most informants were positive to the change regarding secular jobs. 7 informants reported currently holding or having had a secular job, two of whom worked in Family oriented independent companies. Some had begun secular careers some years prior to the Reboot while others had felt held back by the membership requirements. Joshua reviews his own former interpretation of secular employment:

Being a FD member I always felt that "taking a system job" is synonymous with going down the hill of backsliding. Whereas, through this change we can get out of our own bubble protected circle and go into "all the world" to preach the Gospel.<sup>37</sup>

I'm so happy that everyone in the Family can now [have] the freedom to take secular schooling, go to colleges and universities without feeling the guilt of "compromise".<sup>38</sup>

Mark's (and to some extent Carole's) quote highlights the dilemma Joshua spoke of in the previous chapter, which was a direct result of the world-rejecting movement's opinion that the social order is out of line and that all system institutions were impure and should therefore be avoided. Joshua's use of typical Family-language; system job,

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<sup>34</sup> Daniel answer to questionnaire 10/23/2010.

<sup>35</sup> Daniel email 12/7/2010

<sup>36</sup> Paul answer to questionnaire 10/25/2010.

<sup>37</sup> Joshua chat interview 10/28/2010.

<sup>38</sup> Joshua answer to questionnaire 10/22/2010.

backsliding and compromise further emphasizes the strong social boundaries. Daniel's story reflects how the second generation has affected the group. Several families have taken the step to send their children to secular schools prior to the Reboot, thus becoming MM. The same goes for secular employment. As the notion of purity is relational, these families have dealt with the perceived impurity of the secular institution by transcending the pure/impure polarity, and have stopped seeing it as the enemy. Paul seems to still advocate avoidance as a strategy, representing the previously held stance on purity while Joshua seems relieved; as if he had been waiting for this. Daniel seems confident in his family's choices, as if the step wasn't such a big one. Why did some families battle impurity by avoiding it while others seemingly easily transcended it? Is the Reboot the result of an overarching amount of members transcending the categories making them useless?

I think that the answer to that question has a lot to do with the second generation. Daniels quotes circles the realization that seems to be at the core of the Reboot; that the second and third generations will not all want to be full-time missionary members. This is a realization many new religions have to deal with. The second generations of new religious movements will naturally want to reduce strictness and this is probably what has happened in The Family.

Daniel and Joshua connect missionary activities to secular institutions; as did several of the other informants. The secular institutions seem to become incorporated in the religious worlds of members are now seen as a *means* for missionary activities rather than as a hindrance of the same. The changed attitudes among members can be interpreted as a sign of the movement's progress on the scale from world-rejecting to world-accommodating.

### 5.1.3 Lifestyle, culture, terminology and non-members

*In today's world, communal living is not necessarily the best way to be a living testimony of Jesus' love in every country or culture, nor is it the only proof that His teachings can be lived in daily life. In some cultures, a communal home can be a beautiful and compelling testimony, one that is appealing or intriguing to those who are interested. In other cultures, communal living is not highly thought of, nor is it understood, and the very foreignness of it can work against our members being accepted by the people they are trying to reach.*

(Amsterdam, H\_reboot Lifestyle, 2010)

Changing the legislation that all FD members must live communally does not mean that this manner of living is totally rejected. Rather, it means that Family members are free to form their own living arrangements as they wish and that communes previously known as Family Centres will now be seen as private homes of members. There will be no rules concerning communal living as it is seen as a personal choice in conformity with the Reboot as a whole. Several of the interviewed informants reported having broken up their larger communes in favor of smaller ones or of nuclear family setups. Some had broken up their large combo-structure and rented apartments in the same suburb or area, others related to this as being common, especially throughout the first generation members. Some were waiting as the groups leadership has stated that additional instructions will be published in January or February.<sup>39</sup> The breaking up of larger communal homes seems to have been, at least in some areas, an ongoing process in the last two years.

Members responded in the questionnaire that they felt these changes were good or very good (and in one case neither), especially the subject of family culture and terminology. Most members felt changes in terminology were needed as a step in the direction of becoming more relatable to others. However, as we saw with Paul's worries about secular education, Carole had similar feelings about giving up Family-specific phrases:

To be honest I don't like it. It is hard and I definitely don't make the effort to switch at times. Though I do agree with that the terminology needs to change at times I feel like it's stripping away something that makes us weird/cool so it bugs me /.../ I also think that the third generation who are growing up now will also miss out on an entire phase of Family history and will be clueless as to their cultural background and won't appreciate it because by the time they are old enough to remember it it'll all be gone.<sup>40</sup>

Asked to give an example she says:

Inspiration and singing Family songs, memorizing the way we all did, lots of inside jokes, singing "thank you Jesus for this food", mostly fun stuff /.../not that these things are so important but they will miss out on a lot of common ground that the rest of us experienced growing up in the TFI it'll be a foreign concept to them /.../ I think it'll be replaced by secular culture for the most part.<sup>41</sup>

In the Reboot package the term "flee bag" is replace by "emergency survival kit/bag" or "preparedness bag" (Amsterdam & Fontaine, N\_reboot Updating Family Terminology, 2010) The significance of the term seems to have changed. John, who was present at one of the larger raids in the 90s Family homes says he does not think members now are as "persecution conscious" as they were during the 90s. He also explained how the survival kit can come to

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<sup>39</sup> Solomon telephone interview 11/3/2010.

<sup>40</sup> Carole chat interview 10/25/2010.

<sup>41</sup> Carole chat interview 10/25/2010.

mean something slightly different as some members face the threat of persecution or other problems in missionary fields in Africa and Asia.<sup>42</sup> John relates changes in Family terminology to communal living:

That's ok when we were all living in communities /.../ when everything started to change you know kids started going to school and all of that some of that terminology just had to go because it doesn't mean anything to somebody outside /.../ Some of them [the terms] make us a bit more like a club that people have to sort of enter into and they couldn't /.../ they've got to have an explanation of terms /.../ I think that what we're trying to do is to break down those barriers that have stopped us from being able to communicate well with people.<sup>43</sup>

Regarding non-members, Mark says he has a lot of friends outside of TFI and that he is thinking of going out with a girl who is not a member of the Family. Asked if this was not allowed before the Reboot he explains:

That is correct, it was in a sense [sic] going out for a meal or a movie or something it was questioned you know, where I was going and if it was bearing fruit or not but I wasn't forbidden. As for getting into a relationship with this person that was outside the rules /.../ I recognized it needed a change before the Reboot /.../ Having friends and going out with people wasn't forbidden like I said it was just sort of like...where is it going, what are the results? /.../ Are you sharing your faith with them? /.../ whereas now it is more open, you can go out, you can make friends, and you can date you can have a relationship outside the Family without feeling pressured to show some results for it. I still have the personal conviction to share my faith with those I meet, and to help them find the same joy and peace that I have found, but I no longer have someone looking over my shoulder to make sure of it, it's more up to me and my own convictions. Now I do it just because I want to, rather than because a rule says I should, which is much more liberating and even challenging.<sup>44</sup>

Dora says she thinks that she shared her previous doubts about TFI lifestyle rules with a lot of other SGAs. Questioned if the new freedom concerning the possibility to date non-members she retells the problems surrounding the rigorous rules connected to dating and sexual relationships before the Reboot. The former Charters had very specific rules on who could engage in a sexual relationship<sup>45</sup> making it hard sometimes to find a partner just the right age and living in the same commune. Of the change she says:

Now there are no restrictions/.../ and it's something that I'm so grateful for, thank God, I'm 30 years old and it's about time! (laugh)<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> John chat 12/6/2010.

<sup>43</sup> John telephone interview 10/26/2010.

<sup>44</sup> Mark telephone interview 11/3/ 2010.

<sup>45</sup> The rules for teenagers in the 1995 version of the charter states that 16 and 17 year old members may engage in sexual intercourse with members aged 16 through 20 and with the permission from resident parent(s). The two teens must also agree verbally before engaging in a sexual intercourse. Teenagers also had to consent to being guided by parents and/or shepherds in this matter (2010, pp. 277-279). If one of the teens moved out of the age range permission to continue the relationship must be sought from Continental Offices (2010, p. 297). Members aged 14 to 15 were allowed to date members 14 through 17 years old. Dating in this case meant no sexual intercourse and was to be governed by the teens' parents or legal guardians. Dating for those under the age of 14 was the parents' responsibility and sexual actions of all kinds were prohibited (2010, p. 297). The rules concerning members of 18, 19 or 20 years or older were also intermittently rigorous; they could only engage in a sexual relationship with members up to 7 years older and members within the age bracket (2010, p. 234).

<sup>46</sup> Dora telephone interview 11/11/2010.



Carole says she has friends who are former members or non-members, she hopes that the changes will bring about a change in attitude in her as well as in other members regarding non-members:

I think now after the Reboot, TFI members, myself included, will have much more in common with the average person and be much more humble in the way they look at non-TFI members and former TFI members.<sup>47</sup>

Language is a given part of any world. Within The Family, religious language has served as a border guarding mechanism, demarcating insiders and outsiders. A significant change that the Reboot may lead to is the gradual marginalization of the notion of persecution as a historical event and a collective memory, as the third generation are not socialized into a negative attitude towards the system. The abandonment of system-critical language and the acceptance of secular education point to this. What Carole perceives as weird and cool are phenomena contained in a world-rejecting religious world. The change seems to have many reasons but, as John says; one main reason is probably the gradual increase of secular education of the third generation. His statement hints that the clash with the secular world through the education of the third generation has influenced the movement to re-fashion the religious world. Regarding non-members, the new freedom draws new boundaries between the group and the individual and forces both to negotiate a new world. Both Dora's and Mark's accounts of the previous social order show that the social control has been problematic. Previously profane practises are now accepted and the pure/impure dichotomy in relation to non-members and specific culture is transcended in an effort to keep members from leaving the group. The quotes show how inwardly bound the group has been in its world-rejecting practises focusing energy on a system that many members obviously felt bound by. It may be an issue of greater importance for the second generation. The first generations converts generally had many children and it was thought that the children would all become missionaries. As they grew up, prophesy failed in the sense that the end of the world has not yet come and is now thought not to come in the nearest future. None of the four SGAs interviewed had children yet, which indicates that they generally wait longer to have children. The new, loosening structure may in a way mean a second socialization process for the second generation as the secular world draws closer.

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<sup>47</sup> Carole chat interview 10/25/2010.

# 6 Conclusions and suggestions for further research

## 6.1 Conclusions

The ambition of this paper was to answer three questions: what is the Reboot and how do members feel about the alternations concerning social boundaries that the Reboot suggests? I will try to sum up the answers to these questions here.

The Reboot is the organizational change instituted by the leadership of The Family International and presented to members in a publication called “The Reboot Package” in May 2010. It outlines a new policy for membership which includes only one membership level – one applicable only to adults; children and teenagers are not members. It shifts responsibility and the right of determination from the leadership to individual members in the following areas: living situation, educational options, employment options, interaction with non-members and mission work. It places the sole responsibility for children’s socialization, welfare and education on the parents. Tithing is required by members it can be replaced by a monthly gift to a tithing member; both the size of the tithe and the gift is optional. The Charter of the Family is revised and shortened, as many of the rules and regulations previously featured concerned areas where members now have self-determination. The largest change is the abolishment of rules guarding Family homes as these are now seen as private homes. The documents discuss TFI’s history and problematize Family culture, deeming it too exclusive and non- relatable to outsiders. A short list of changes regarding Family-specific terminology is suggested.

As most informants were in the midst of the changes taking place, not many had decided what to do; yet some had already moved from traditional Family homes into smaller apartments, while others were waiting for further directions from the leadership, which will be published in January 2011. The fastest change seems to be in relocating and sending children to secular schools.

The paper aimed to show how members perceived the changes, and the overall attitude is that they felt these were both needed and a relief, albeit a bit uncertain. The movement's history shows that it has been a world-rejecting new religion; socialization has been taking place within the group and a strong dichotomous view has led members to perceive the highest level of membership as a manifestation of purity. When purity was threatened by secular institutions, some members avoided it while others transcended the pure/impure categories with the institutionalization of the MM category. One might wonder why some families adapted the MM status while others rejected it. The answer is probably only a question of time as the leadership had emphasized that it was not a less valuable category.

A better research question would have been: what led to this change? After reading and talking to members my impression is that the Reboot is a result of the second generations demand for less tension with mainstream society. Educating the second (and third) generations and socializing them has been one of The Family's main tasks as membership figures have largely depended on fertility. Now the movement's leadership (and members) recognize that not all children will want to become missionaries. This calls for a new strategy and I think that, as we saw in the empirical chapter, that the movement would have had a hard time retaining the second generation without decreasing tension with secular institutions concerning education, employment and other Christians. The Shake-Up 2000 was an attempt to come to terms with the growing number of dissatisfied SGAs who had little interest in missionary work but did not want to leave The Family. Unfortunately, I know of no figures of how many families has become MM but a qualified guess is that the numbers, who chose this solution, whether for the sake of alternative educational options, financial difficulties or age, were threatening to become the largest part of the total sum of members. With the number of MM who had interaction with secular institutions increasing, the notions of them as impure lessened which in turn affected the whole organization and started the process foregoing the Reboot.

There is a possibility of a decrease in membership numbers with a development similar to the one in RNR in 1978 when many members moved out and lived in nuclear families and subsequently left the group. The significant change is that this time it is motivated by the second generation. The Family has listened to researchers such as Bainbridge's suggestions on how to promote growth and taken a serious step on the scale from world-rejecting to world-accommodating.

## 6.2 Further research

A great deal of research should, and hopefully will, be done on the development of the group. Here follows a list of interesting aspects that need study:

- A textual comparison between the new documents and the older Charters. This would give a fuller comprehension of the changes than I have been able to present here.
- Another interesting point of research, which may be possible in a year or two times, is to measure the numbers that have defected due to the Reboot.
- Many of the informants had been starting to send their children to secular schools. How this affects the children's socialization into the group in terms of how many of the third generation that will be members of The Family as adults is also an interesting research question.

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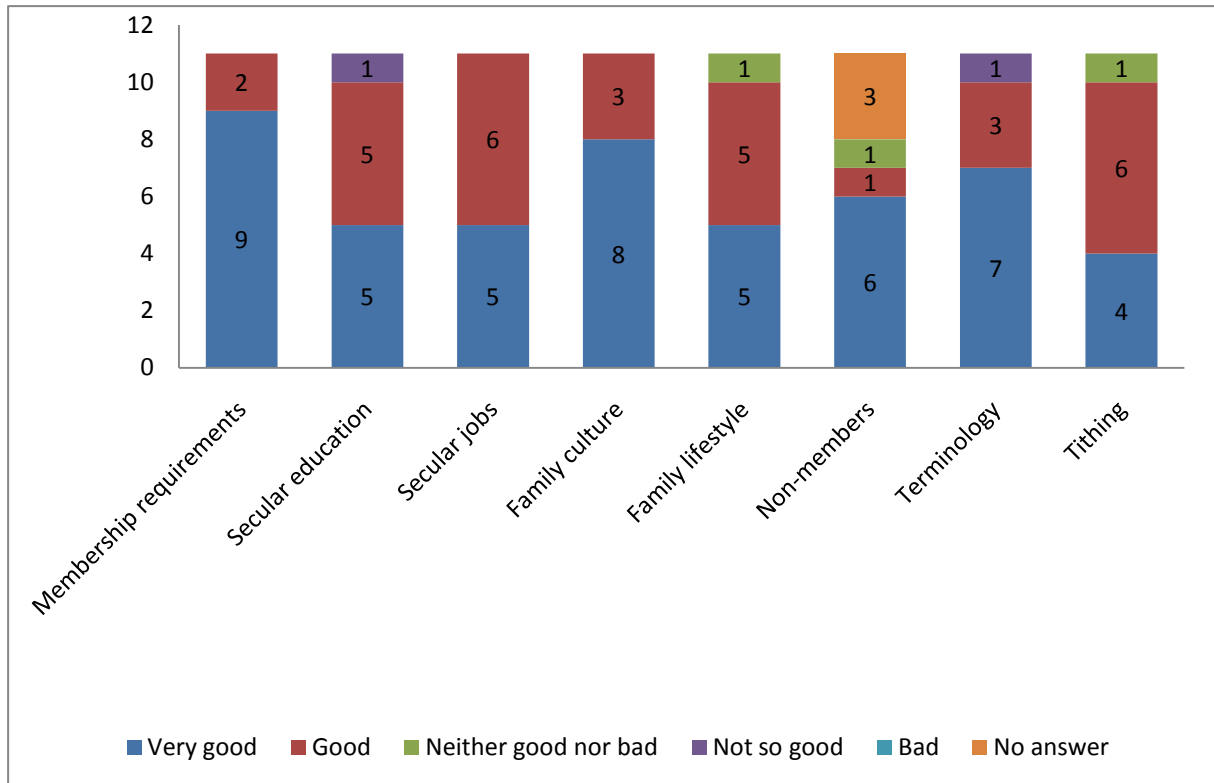
# 8 Appendix

## 8.1.1 Documents contained in The Reboot Package

(published 25-31 May 2010).

- (A) Change Journey manifesto
- (B) Preface to Reboot Document
- (C) Backtracking Through TFI History
- (D) Blueprint for the future
- (E) TFI Statement of Faith
- (F) TFI Mission Statement
- (G) Membership
- (H) Lifestyle
- (I) Structure and Service
- (J) Tithing and Giving
- (K) Faf (Family Aid Fund)
- (L) Member Works
- (M) Building Community
- (N) Updating Family Terminology
- (O) Applying the Law of Love
- (P) Membership Accountability
- (Q) A safe Haven for Our Children

## 8.1.2 Results of questionnaire



### 8.1.3 Request for participation in study

My name is Sanja Nilsson, I'm a student of sociology at the University of Lund in Sweden. This semester I am writing a paper for my master's degree in sociology. I also have a bachelor's degree in religious studies from Dalarna University in Sweden.

As a student of both sociology and religious studies, I take great interest in The Family International. I have had the opportunity to spend a day in a home in Ireland two years ago and I have met Family members here in Sweden and in England.

I am very interested in the Family's recent development, specifically concerning changes brought about by the reboot and I would like to know how you, as Family members, perceive these changes and what it means for you both on a practical but also on an emotional, level. My aim was to make interviews of 20-30 minutes by skype or telephone but I was told that some of you would have liked to write your responses as it would give you a greater chance to think through the questions. The questionnaire focuses on some of the changes in a very open manner and my hope is that you will take time to choose what areas are important for you and maybe write something about that. Should you feel you want to participate in an interview based on the questions, I would be most thankful. Interviews are conducted 17<sup>th</sup> October-1<sup>st</sup> November 2010. If you feel you want to write more freely on a separate document please attach it with the questionnaire.

The questionnaire and all other material, such as interviews or email correspondences, are strictly confidential. To protect your anonymity I will use pseudonyms while working on the paper as well as in the final text. You will also be sent a copy of the paper when it is finished. You are free to discontinue participation at any time up until the 1<sup>st</sup> November 2010.

If you have any questions email me at: [sns@du.se](mailto:sns@du.se)

Thank you for participating!

### 8.1.4 Questionnaire

**How to fill out the questionnaire:** *Please read the questions and answer to them in a separate document. Make sure to write out the number and letter in front of your answer.*

#### **First part**

#### **1. General/demographic questions**

**a. Gender**   **b. Age**

**c.** In which country were you born?

**d.** Where do you currently live?

#### **2. Education & work**

**a.** How many years of schooling do you have?   **b.** In what country did you go to school?

**c.** Were you home-schooled?   **d.** Do you have a secular job?   **e.** In case you answer to the previous question was yes, please state where you work?

#### **3. Marital status**

**a.** Are you married?

#### **4. Children**

**a.** Do you have children? If yes, how many?   **b.** Do they live with you?   **c.** Are/have your children (been) home-schooled?

#### **5. Membership**

**a.** Are you FGA, SGA or TGA?   **b.** How long have you been a member of TFI?   **c.** What level of membership have you had before the reboot? FD/MM/FM/AM/GM?

**b.** How would you describe your current membership?

#### **Second part**

***Here are some questions on your response to the changes presented in the Reboot package.***

**1.** First is a question concerning Your personal overall view on the reboot package.

Please choose an option:

- a. I'm positive
- b. I'm mainly positive
- c. I'm neither positive nor negative
- d. I'm sceptical
- e. I'm not positive at all

**2.** You may be positive/negative concerning different areas of change within the reboot package. Below there are categories regarding some of the changes. Please choose one of the five options below for each category that best describes your attitude regarding changes in that specific category:

A= Very good B= Good C= Neither good nor bad D=Not so good E=Bad

Put the letter next to the letter of the question: "3.a A, 3.b D etc". Feel free to add a personal comment if you wish to explain your attitude regarding specific changes.

**3.**

- a. I feel changes in membership requirements are...
  
- b. I feel changes regarding secular schooling are...
  
- c. I feel changes regarding secular jobs are...
  
- d. I feel changes regarding Family culture are...
  
- e. I feel changes regarding lifestyle within TFI are...
  
- f. I feel changes regarding non-members are...
  
- g. I feel changes in Family terminology are...
  
- h. I feel changes regarding tithing are...

Please send your reply by e-mail to: [sns@du.se](mailto:sns@du.se)

***Thank You for participating!***

