

Another Cult Accused of Molesting Children

by Susan Brinkmann, OCDS
Staff Writer

(May 1, 2008) Only weeks after police removed all the women and children from a polygamy cult in Texas due to sexual abuse, four children have been removed from a bizarre doomsday cult based in northeastern New Mexico for similar reasons.

Police raided a cult compound known as “Strong City” on April 22, removing four children after former cult members alleged they were being subject to inappropriate contact.

The leader of the cult Wayne C. Bent, 66, who also goes by the name of Michael Travesser, is a self-proclaimed Messiah who heads a cult of about 70 members known as The Lord Our Righteousness Church located near Travesser Park, New Mexico. He considers the removal of the children to be a kidnaping and claims he has not eaten since the children were removed.

One of the girls removed from the compound, who goes by the name of Healed, says that she was one of seven virgins who was told to lie naked on a bed with Bent but that she wasn't “molested.”

While Bent acknowledges having the girls lie naked on his bed and having sex with followers, including repeatedly with a daughter-in-law, he has denied having sex with girls.

“There has never been ‘sex with minors’ or anything remotely approaching that, and I was never the initiator in any of the events,” Bent said on an April 30 posting on the cult’s website.

Also appearing on the site is a posting by Bent’s daughter, Willow, who said she does not understand why Healed was taken away. “She was happy here. All her friends were here. Everything she knew was here, but they took her. They said someone had allegations against her parents, and it was under investigation. . . . I don’t know what is going to happen with this. But one thing I do know is that everything is on God’s hands We will see what happens, but I do know, God always wins.”

Bent and his cult have been around for more than 20 years, living in mostly rural areas in Washington state, Idaho, California, then moving to New Mexico in 2000. He predicted the end of the world on October 31, 2007 and neighbors became concerned when members of the group stopped taking outside jobs and disconnected their phone lines in preparation for the event.

Neighbors say cult members who worked mostly as housekeepers and mechanics or electricians, were nice people who were hard workers.

Suzanne Bennefield, who owns a ranch nearby, said two girls from Strong City worked for her for awhile. “They were hard-working girls, excellent with the animals,” she told the *Albuquerque Journal*.

Bennefield said the girls told her they were not being sexually abused at Strong City and would

leave if they were. One of the girls has since admitted that she was one of the virgins who was naked with Bent.

The girls were told they would never marry and have children and, like other females at the compound, were required to wear dresses, Bennefield said. Bent granted an exception to the dress rule when they worked at the ranch. All of the paychecks she wrote to the girls were signed over to Bent.

Rick A. Ross, of Jersey City, N.J., an expert on cults, said the group was very extreme after watching a National Geographic Special about the cult.

"The footage was alarming in that . . . these people that I watched in the documentary seem completely enthralled with him to the exclusion of any practical considerations and that they would be willing to sacrifice their children to him. . . .

"When groups retreat to a compound and they live together communally in an intentional community like that, that is unusual. Not all groups are that controlled."

Bent posted an angry message on the cult's Web site condemning the removal of the children: "The state, the beast power, is simply manufacturing a story out of their own hallucinations," the posting said. "They have gone mad, and God will soon bring them all to destruction."

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