

**CHRIST IS THE ANSWER:  
AN EXAMINATION OF A RELIGIOUS GROUP  
INFLUENCED BY THE JESUS MOVEMENT**

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**ABSTRACT:** The late 1960's and early 1970's witnessed the emergence of the Jesus Movement. This movement originated in California and the Pacific Northwest region of the United States and tended to appeal to hippies, drug addicts, and ex-drug addicts. Adherents generally began practicing fundamentalist, charismatic forms of Christianity; members also tended to possess strong apocalyptic beliefs and be attracted to communitarian lifestyles.

This paper is intended to be a preliminary description and analysis of a segment of a religious group that originated during this time period, the travelling United States branch of Christ is the Answer (CITA). It was found that this group has undergone a number of structural changes since its beginning. It appears that the doctrinal message has remained fairly constant over time, though this must be inferred as a result of high turn-over within the group. Though the ministry is still strongly sectarian, almost all vestiges of the Jesus Movement culture have disappeared. It is suggested that this group is presently in a period of transition. (*Historical note: research and interviews for this paper were done during the summer and autumn of 1990.*)

## INTRODUCTION

Balch<sup>(1)</sup> has suggested that information on new religious movements (NRMs) be collected and categorized in order to facilitate comparative study of such groups. The author goes on to suggest that the following categories be employed: (1) demographic characteristics of membership; (2) historical development; (3) structure and content of belief systems; (4) leadership and social organization; (5) relationship of members to outsiders; (6) economic practices; (7) material culture; (8) patterns of everyday life; (9) talk patterns; (10) sexual patterns; (11) child rearing; (12) deviance and social control; (13) recruitment strategies; (14) commitments and sacrifices required of members; (15) socialization techniques; (16) conversion patterns; and (17) defection patterns.

This paper attempts to utilize some of Balch's suggested criteria<sup>(2)</sup> in the investigation of a NRM, the mobile United States branch of Christ is the Answer (CITA). This group originated in the 1960's as a travelling evangelistic ministry. While the group appears to come from the same mold as that of the independent travelling pentecostal evangelists that emerged in America in the late 1950's,<sup>(3)</sup> CITA also has been influenced, at least at the outset, by the Jesus Movement which was active during the time of the ministry's formation. The purpose of this paper is two-fold: first, to describe and analyze the CITA ministry, and secondly, to see if this group has retained any traces of the Jesus Movement Christian counter-culture.<sup>(4)</sup>

## HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The decade of the 1960's was a period of social and political upheaval within the United States. Religiously, one of the most significant aspects of this era was the rise of the Jesus Movement. The exact origin of the movement appears to have been diffuse; a number of groups came into existence independently at roughly the same time,<sup>(5)</sup> though ministries first appeared on the West coast of North America. Early participants in the movement include youth evangelist Arthur Blessitt in San Francisco, Ted and Elizabeth Wise of Sausalito and Haight-Ashbury, Jack Sparks and the Christian World Liberation Front of Berkeley, "Moses" David Berg of the Children of God, and Linda Meissner of the Jesus People's Army, which operated in the Seattle/Vancouver area.

While the Jesus Movement had no central headquarters per se, the participants within the movement did tend to share a number of common characteristics. Adherents frequently adapted a fundamentalist religious viewpoint characterized by an emphasis upon the "fundamentals" of the orthodox understanding of the Christian faith.<sup>(6)</sup> Emphasis was placed upon having a personal relationship with Jesus and, at times, the necessity of a radical response to the Christian Gospel message.<sup>(7)</sup> Jesus People usually had a strong apocalyptic belief that theirs would be the last generation before the second coming of Christ; many Jesus People also expressed a strong interest in community and experimentation with communal lifestyles.<sup>(8)</sup>

The Jesus People, with their hippie roots, possessed a high regard for subjective religious experience that led many in the movement to embrace pentecostal Christianity. This form of spirituality tended to embrace emotionalism in religious observances as well as a belief in the charismatic "gifts of the Holy Spirit." These characteristics appealed to many within the counter-culture who were yearning for direct,

immediate experience.<sup>(9)</sup> Furthermore, this form of faith offered a benefit in that it frequently acted as a means of deliverance from drug dependency.

Many of these groups displayed somewhat similar patterns of development: an evangelist or ordained minister would start ministering to hippies or other alienated and/or disenfranchised youth. Frequently this was accomplished through the opening of a Christian coffee house or simply through Bible studies and street preaching. Youth would congregate, many of them lacking in skills and financial resources; often such youth would have difficulties such as drug problems or histories of abuse.<sup>(10)</sup> Some converts would themselves feel called to be evangelists, thus spreading the movement.

## THE FOUNDING OF CITA

One such person was Bill Lowery. In 1966, Lowery and his wife, Sara, were converted to Christianity by a farmer who was a member of the Christian Church.<sup>(11)</sup> Heavily in debt at the time, the couple then began working three jobs in order to free themselves from their financial obligations. When this was accomplished, the Lowerys enrolled in an Assembly of God Bible school. In 1968 they began a denominationally-independent travelling tent ministry. While preaching in Europe in 1970, the couple "realized that unless we duplicated ourselves, we would not live long enough to get the job done."<sup>(12)</sup> To aid in this goal, Lowery recruited fifty members from the Jesus People Milwaukee commune<sup>(13)</sup> and coffee house in 1971, a move that appeared to "increase the impact that the Gospel had in local communities . . . ."<sup>(14)</sup>

By 1974, Lowery's Christ is the Answer (CITA) ministry had grown to over 250 persons and persons "from all walks of life [were] traveling with us: school teachers, businessmen, ex-cons, ex-drug dealers, ex-prostitutes . . . ." It appears that at least some of the characteristics of the absorbed Jesus People commune remained; the persons in the ministry were described by Lowery as "all living together with the common desire and responsibility to share the love of Jesus with every individual that we came in contact with."<sup>(15)</sup> The ministry was divided into "families," each presided over by a pastor:

. . . [T]here would be like a pastor over . . . a specific group of brothers and sisters. . . . He would take care of whatever needs might be there--physically, spiritually . . . . He would pastor them, have devotions, study the Word, and things.<sup>(16)</sup>

These families would rotate chores and responsibilities within the ministry such as street ministry camp maintenance. Supervision was provided by deacons in charge of particular areas of the ministry. This organization was described by one person in para-military terms:

It was a lot like a military type of camp. Not military [as in] military-fighting, but it was like the job corps [or] peace corps.<sup>(17)</sup>

This time period is remembered as a period of dynamic growth and missionary activity:

People began to get saved on elevators, in public restrooms and in shopping malls. Prostitutes were giving their lives to Jesus on street corners. White-collar businessmen were also receiving Jesus as their Lord and Savior. High-school students were being introduced to Him before their classes started in the mornings as teams witnessed in front of their schools. Massage parlors and x-rated movie houses were being shut down as nightly witnessing teams went out to be lights in the very darkest hell-bound places. <sup>(18)</sup>

The time also witnessed the beginning of the group's permanent overseas ministries. In 1974, between forty and fifty youth departed for Europe; arriving in Copenhagen, the group travelled through Denmark, Sweden, Finland, Holland, Germany, and Italy. <sup>(19)</sup> This group eventually made Italy its primary target of evangelism, and by 1989 the group had grown in size to include 120 men, women, and children. <sup>(20)</sup>

The American and European teams have continued to launch new ministries. In 1979 the Italian team launched a ministry to Spain; this group had 60 members as of 1987. In 1981, two American CITA members began a ministry in the Philippines which by 1987 claimed 47 members. <sup>(21)</sup> During the same year, the Christ is the Answer border ministry began in El Paso, Texas. This ministry, which began after CITA's revival tent was blown down during a crusade, is significant in that it is perhaps the only non-mobile team within CITA. This group eventually came to serve as the headquarters of the American branch of the ministry. <sup>(22)</sup>

Other CITA missionary teams include an evangelism team of forty sent to Portugal in May of 1983. <sup>(23)</sup> In 1984, a group was sent to Mexico; by 1987 the group numbered 50 members. In July of 1987 a group of fifteen missionaries was sent to El Salvador; this group has since grown in number to 45 persons. A second tent ministry was dispatched to Juarez in 1987, and in October of the same year a team was sent to India. <sup>(24)</sup> Other teams are presently operating in Pakistan, Hungary, and Romania. <sup>(25)</sup>

## CITA IN THE UNITED STATES

Throughout this period of expansion, Lowery and his wife remained in charge of CITA's tent ministry in the United States. During this time, Lowery changed a portion of his missionary emphasis; with the gradual demise of the counter-culture, the evangelist "went from hippies to yuppies." <sup>(26)</sup> Apparently this change was made more out of an interest in maintaining cultural relevancy than out of a desire for a different clientele; Lowery describes his ministry as a "grassroots" outreach. The evangelist himself suggests that the lifestyle of the group serves as evidence for his claim, in that the group continues to travel in buses and live in tents; this is perceived as the most effective way to "chase sinners." <sup>(27)</sup> In a similar vein, the group's primary work is considered to be evangelism, especially through street witnessing, <sup>(28)</sup> and preparing missionaries to be sent abroad:

We have such a burden for evangelism that by the time that [new CITA members] get us [so that] they can help you, we ship them off. It's like a family--when the kids grow up, to that they can really help you and be of assistance, then they go off. . . . [This] group is always so young. Green recruits, always, because we try to get them out as soon as they show

consistency to spiritual growth and as long as they can handle responsibility, and we'll take a chance on them.<sup>(29)</sup>

Evangelists, in the view of the Lowerys, are thus called to move and not settle down; a corollary to this is that persons involved in missionary activity should not work in secular jobs but instead rely on donations and divine providence.<sup>(30)</sup>

## LIFE WITHIN CHRIST IS THE ANSWER

Christ is the Answer is a mobile ministry consisting of ten Grey-hound style buses that have been converted into mobile dormitories and a kitchen, plus six semi trailers of equipment. The group presently numbers approximately forty-five to fifty men, women, and children. Single men and women live in converted Grey-hound style buses, while families tend to own their own campers.<sup>(31)</sup> Life within the CITA ministry is centered around witnessing and evangelism. According to Sara Lowery, street ministry is considered the activity of primary importance.<sup>(32)</sup> This consists primarily of street preaching, witnessing to passers-by, passing out tracts, and inviting persons to attend the evening revival. A typical day's schedule is as follows:<sup>(33)</sup>

6:30 Wake up

7:15 Breakfast

9:00 Group meeting

10:00 Witnessing or work in camp

12:30 Lunch

4:00 Return to camp

5:00 Dinner

7:00 Revival meeting

(approx) 11:30 Return to camp and sleep

The morning group meeting, called "Formation," consists of singing songs, reading scriptures, and assignment of daily duties. Other activities include witnessing in nursing homes and in prisons, "as opportunity permits."<sup>(34)</sup> Friday and Saturday evenings teams may also go out witnessing to youth, while Tuesdays and Sundays are generally days off. On Sunday, members of the ministry divide into groups and go to different churches within the city in which they are currently located, "for fellowship."<sup>(35)</sup>

When asked what persons in the ministry do for recreation, responses were varied. Ms. Lowery stated,

"[We] preach. We sweat for fun. We read our Bibles for fun." Another person gave a more moderate answer that appeared to be more representative of the rest of the group's members:

We go sightseeing, or we go up to the mountains--it depends on where we are at. Or we might go over to somebody's house, if they invite us and, you know, eat and talk and play cassettes . . . or watch a video. . . . Go swimming if there's somewhere we can go swimming.<sup>(36)</sup>

Television is avoided by many if not most members of the group, because the contents of many programs are considered corrupt. Similarly, music within the group is restricted to Christian music; the person cited in the quote above stated,

[N]inty-nine percent of the time, the music lyrics is [sic] corrupt and perverted and it leads to nothing but immorality and other things like that. And some of the music is demonic. It surround either around sex, drugs, you know--"beat your mama, kill your kids," or on "the highway to Hell" . . . and it's not edifying. You know, it's not Godly.<sup>(37)</sup>

The issue of dating within the community presently appears to be a subject of some ambivalence. While dating is heavily regulated within the group one person told this investigator that, "[The rules] have changed within the last six months. Circumstances have caused them to change." Others echoed this sentiment, but specifics were not forthcoming even after repeated queries. Part of this uncertainty may be due to the overseas ministries tendency to adapt local dating norms, some of which are quite restrictive. One person, a romantically unattached male, spoke about dating life within this specific CITA group:

. . . If you've been around and enough things have happened for long enough, then if a brother and sister who've both been around for a long time are interested in one another, and have been so for a very long time, then with another brother or another sister [couple?], who preferably just like each other, they can go someplace.

At this point, an engaged woman pointed out that dating within the ministry is only done for the purpose of becoming married; dating for it's own sake is not allowed. The reason for this, an ex-member supplied, is that "nobody's here to date, really; they're here to serve God."

Ms. Lowery provided a slightly different perspective on the relationship question:

They have to find somebody. That's the problem. . . . Anyone who's serious about the Lord, is going to find someone [else] that's serious. A girl doesn't want to marry a guy that isn't going to stay in missions if she's here. . . . She doesn't want to marry a doctor, a lawyer, an Indian chief. She wants to marry a missionary, and you have to find them. And that's a big job. A guy doesn't want to marry a woman that's going to flake out on him, and won't support him on the mission field.<sup>(38)</sup>

## DOCTRINE AND BELIEFS

As indicated above, the need for evangelism and conversion is central to the teachings and beliefs of CITA members. Also figuring prominently within CITA beliefs is a pentecostal ideal of work of the Holy Spirit. This belief appears to come from Lowery's background in the Assemblies of God. However, the Lowerys' dislike being labelled as "charismatic"; this term is thought to have "overtones that don't . . . express what the purpose of CITA is . . ." <sup>(39)</sup> Most members seem to practice or else desire to receive a "prayer language," a manifestation of glossolalia used primarily in private prayer. Members also believe in divine healing and in the inerrancy of the Biblical scriptures.

When questioned about the finer points of the beliefs and lifestyle of the group, several members directed this investigator to read a small book that is made available at the group's nightly revivals. The introduction to this book states,

The pathway to true discipleship begins when the person is born again. It begins when the following events take place:

1. When a person realizes that he is sinful, lost blind, and naked before God.
2. When he acknowledges that he cannot save himself by character or good works.
3. When he believes that the Lord Jesus Christ died as his substitute on the Cross.
4. When by a definite decision of faith, he acknowledges Jesus Christ as his only Lord and Savior.

This is how a person becomes a Christian. . . . Too many people think that you become a Christian by living a Christian life. NOT at all! You must first become a Christian before you can live a Christian life. <sup>(40)</sup>

"True discipleship" is then described. According to the author, this entails "a supreme love of Christ," "a denial of self," "a deliberate choosing of the cross," "a life spent following Christ," "a fervent love for all who belong to Christ," "an unswerving continuance in His Word," and "a forsaking of all to follow Him [i.e., Christ]." <sup>(41)</sup> Evident within the book is a commitment to fundamentalist orthodox belief, with an emphasis placed upon intellectual subscription to dogma.

Pervading the work, however, are notions of ascetic "denial of self" for the sake of the Christian cause. Examples of this are found in statements such as, "Self-love is one of the stubbornest hindrances to discipleship." <sup>(42)</sup> The author explicitly states that hardship is not undertaken for its own sake:

Denial of self is not the same thing as self-denial. The latter means foregoing certain foods, pleasures, or possessions. But denial of self means such complete submission to the lordship of Christ that the self has no rights or authority at all. . . . It is expressed in the words of Henry Martyn, "Lord, let me have no will of my own, or consider my true happiness as depending in the smallest degree on anything that can befall me outwardly, but as consisting altogether in conformity to Thy will." <sup>(43)</sup>

The author of True Discipleship makes another noteworthy point: in "choosing the cross" it is expected that one will as a result follow a path "in which so far as the world goes is one of dishonor and

reproach." The reason for this is that the cross

symbolizes the shame, persecution and abuse which the world heaped upon the Son of God, and which the world will heap on any who choose to stand against the tide.<sup>(44)</sup>

The true Christian disciple is thus called to live under the possible "shadow of martyrdom;"<sup>(45)</sup> this mentality also fosters an ethic of separation from the secular world. Members of CITA appear to be largely apolitical except in the case of a few issues such as the desirability of prayer in school and support for pro-life legislation. Persons involved within this ministry also seem to display a lack of interest in current events, except in the case of events that may have apocalyptic significance as in the case of political unrest in the Middle East.

It is necessary to realize that CITA's conversionist beliefs, and ethics of cultural separation and "denial of self," are driven by an apocalyptic urgency; Lowery feels that Christ will return by the year 2000.<sup>(46)</sup> This concern was echoed in a recent issue of CITA's magazine, Frontline, an issue dedicated totally to the question of the second coming. The opening article concludes with the statement:

Are you listening? Can you hear the urgency in the shout for the bride [i.e., the Church] to arise, clean up and be waiting for The Bride Groom? Knowing the time is now, we must wake up from our slumber, for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed. . . .<sup>(47)</sup>

Another article in the same issue reads,

This is the LAST CALL to a perverse generation. God in His mercy, does not want any to perish. Also it is His LAST CALL to the believer to sound the trumpet. . . .<sup>(48)</sup>

Similarly, a flyer passed out by the group states,

The Bible says, that TODAY is the day of salvation, regardless of your age or circumstance there is no tomorrow. . . .The Bible will give you insight and strenght [sic] in your life, to become the person that God wants you to be. The Bible's prophecy will tell you of events to come, and how you may prepare to live each day as a victorious Christian.

Another flyer passed out by the group reads:

Jesus wants to meet your every need. He wants to be your healer, your counselor, your Savior, and friend. He is the answer to every problem you have. Give him your life and trust him TODAY!

MESSIAH, Savior Christ Jesus, is coming soon, very soon! When Jesus comes back, he will open the millennium. He will reign.<sup>(49)</sup>

The other side of the flyer states,

Ron Paul, a former Congressman, in a recent public statement exposes the government's secret plan to issue a new currency . . .

Ron Paul exposes not only the vicious New Money, but the "Ecu" drive for a one-world government, a world currency, and a world central bank, exchange controls to hold people hostage, while the dollar drops down a hole, the Trilateral Commission's plan for America, the "smartcard," an updated Soviet-style internal passport that the Trilateral Commission wants to force everyone to carry.

It's later than you think, dear reader. The stage is being set for a new Economic World Order in which the World Dictator will emerge--the Antichrist. . . .

Time to get into the Ark, before the New Noah shuts the door. . . . Satan's masterplan is unfolding. Are you in Christ's masterplan? Better wake up before it's too late. [\(50\)](#)

## MEMBERSHIP

Christ is the Answer appears to recruit continuously. These recruits do not appear to come about as a result of conversions that take place during nightly revivals; rather, most appear to have been converted before coming in contact with the ministry and to have arrived at many of the ministry's tenets of belief prior to contact with the group. This pattern occurred frequently--a person experiences conversion or else is led to a new understanding in his or her faith; a few months later the person encounters Christ is the Answer and joins.

. . . I was in the Navy and this team passed through Jacksonville, Florida, and I was quite impressed by the separation from the world . . . . And the mission field, it always did appeal to me. So, being in the Navy, I just got saved . . . about four months before they came through town. . . . I was really interested. And then I got out of the Navy and got a job and everything, and I was just miserable--spiritually miserable. So then I saw them on TV, and I really got excited. So I called up El Paso--they accepted my application, so I met the team in Illinois. . . .

Another member told a similar story:

My life was pretty messed up. I was miserable. I wanted to know the truth. I said [to God] "What's this safe business?" . . . But I found out what "saved" meant from the Bible, and then I went to church until I really understood what "saved" meant and then I gave my life to Jesus . . . at an independent church, nondenominational . . . I went there long enough to

get saved and then they changed the location and I didn't have anyway to go where they went.

After this, my informant spent approximately five years in the Catholic Church. At the end of this period,

I got out of the Catholic Church. I was out of it for a little while, then I said, "Cool--where do I belong next? . . . I want to win some souls, I want to be surrounded by right doctrine." So God sent me here.<sup>(51)</sup>

While only a small number of persons could be interviewed in detail during the course of this study, several themes emerged that strongly reflected the officially-held beliefs of the group. These were a desire to engage in missionary activity, a belief that Christ will soon return (or that the world is about to end), and a desire to live a holy life.<sup>(52)</sup> One person stated:

What I really wanted is someplace that I could be fruitful, because I didn't know how to win souls for Christ. . . . [W]hen I was young and unsaved I was really into the sciences, and I wanted to learn physics when I was older . . . I thought physics was neat. It's still neat, but then I got to thinking, "Well, that's not that fruitful; how much lasting impact can I have in individual human lives [if] the kind of stuff that I was into was so removed from application that it would have taken a long time before it could ever have been. So I said, "So what?" I figured that the world didn't have that long to be . . . .

When asked when he thought that Jesus would return, the reply

was "very soon." The reason for this was

I've read the Bible, I've read history, [and] I feel it in my spirit. . . . There's lots of things . . . I could go through lots of scriptures and show it to you. Like the fact that we're getting past the earthquakes; there's the increase in wars, and yet there is a rumor of peace at the same time; where people are itching at the trigger fingers and have more instruments of death that are more effective than they have ever had in the past; and people are saying "Ah! We all love each other! The world is really getting things together." All this ridiculousness and this dichotomy between their words and their actions, their words and reality. Mostly it's just because of the fact that my spirit says that the time is soon. In fact, ever since I've been saved, I've known. . . .

A mechanic within the group stated:

If we're really saved, there's going to be a life-changing experience . . . and an eternal

benefit from that. And we have to spread the news. We're not doing nothing [sic] to spread the news if we're just going to church once a week, a couple of hours, and just living like we always do. We dedicate our lives for the spreading of the Gospel, because everything else is vain . . . everything else is vanity. [God's] the only thing that matters--because this world is going to end very soon. . . . I'm no longer planning for retirement . . . .

## IN SEARCH OF THE JESUS MOVEMENT

CITA, as mentioned earlier, formed during the time of the counter-culture and drew its original workers from a commune of Jesus People. At the present time, however, CITA betrays little of its origins to the casual observer. Participants within the ministry do not have long hair or wear unusual clothing, and language patterns are not strikingly different from those observed among other Evangelical or mainstream Pentecostal groups.<sup>(53)</sup>

Though affirming CITA's origins in the Jesus Movement, Bill Lowery appears to be distancing himself somewhat from the Jesus People tradition. Lowery is somewhat critical of CITA's sister, Jesus People U.S.A., on the grounds of the latter group's sedentary lifestyle; he also feels that the other ministry has unnecessarily limited its appeal as a result of Jesus People U.S.A.'s continuing interest in ministry to the counter-culture.<sup>(54)</sup> Some attributes of the Jesus movement may persist within the group. Certain observed behaviors--such as the extensive use of tracts, street witnessing, and the passing out of "Repent or Perish," "Jesus Loves You," and "The End Is Near" stickers, as well as interest in Christian rock and pop music--could be interpreted as being remnants of the Jesus Movement, though such interests and activities have become accepted within conservative Christian culture to the point that they might no longer be considered especially noteworthy.

Indeed, most of the cultural "survivals," if any, overlap with other traditional evangelical traits. Within both evangelicalism and the Jesus Movement, persons have traditionally displayed an interest in a subjective experience of the living presence of Jesus Christ, a desire to have the joy of knowing Jesus, gospel music, a sense of being a pure, Gospel-oriented, separated culture, belief in miracles and Biblical literalism. Furthermore, both evangelicals and members of the Jesus Movement also tend to view politics more in terms of single issues than as an integrated system.<sup>(55)</sup> Independent pentecostal evangelists and the leaders of the Jesus movement also shared characteristics, such as occasionally strained relationships between the evangelists and both the denominational leaders and local ministers;<sup>(56)</sup> in addition, both the Jesus Movement and the Pentecostal ministers at times received financial support from the Full Gospel Business Men's Fellowship International.<sup>(57)</sup>

Each of these characteristics is also descriptive of the Christ is the Answer ministry. Perhaps the main characteristics that CITA shares with the Jesus Movement more than with other conservative Christian groups are strong expectations of the approaching end of the world and firm convictions about the corrupt nature of society. Yet such inclinations are more matters of degree than cases of affirmation versus denial. Many conservative Christian groups have strong opinions about the approaching end times, the main difference perhaps being that members of the more mainstream groups do tend to make some provision for retirement as well.

More striking are the differences now between this branch of CITA and the Jesus Movement in general. In spite of the fact that the people comprising the ministry all live together, much of the former communitarian spirit appears to have been lost. The old family system appears to have broken down; all

personnel are primarily responsible to Bill Lowery rather than to an elder or deacon.<sup>(58)</sup> Much of the emphasis formerly placed upon sharing has been lost as well; CITA members tend to dislike having the group referred to as a commune. Similarly, one long-term member asked about the notion of sharing all things in common responded:

We used to really have that down. We were really into sharing all things in common. . . . [Now] it's different. We do have all things in common, and yet it is up to the individual. Before it used to be more regulated.<sup>(59)</sup>

Also surprising is the lack of devotionism apparent within the group. Members within the Jesus Movement, especially those coming from the old Jesus People Milwaukee commune, have achieved a certain level of notoriety for the intensity of their individual and collective study of the Bible.<sup>(60)</sup> This is questionable in the case of CITA; except for morning devotions, no consistent Bible study is carried out by the group. Biblical allusions appear to be lacking from conversation, except in the case of discussions with potential converts. These changes in the ministry have not been lost on one member, who recently rejoined the group after a seventeen-year absence:

. . . I remember you could wake up one day and after everyone was assigned a job, you could see five guys over here praying together over somebody's needs. You could see some sisters and brothers over here talking about the Word, like having a Bible study. But I haven't seen any of that in five weeks [the length of time that this person had been with the group for the second time]. That's missing. And when that's missing, you're missing a lot of power, a lot of that closeness with the Lord, which is needed especially today. Because it's not religion here--it's a relationship with the Lord.

## A MINISTRY IN TRANSITION

Lofland and Skonovd have proposed that religious conversion can be classified according to a system of "conversion motifs."<sup>(61)</sup> These motifs are derived from five variables: degree of social pressure involved in causing conversion; temporal duration of the experience; level of affective arousal; affective content or tone of the experience; and belief-participation sequence. In the case of this particular CITA group it would seem that a transition is taking place; the group is moving away from an affectional motif of conversion, characterized by medium social pressure, long temporal duration, medium level of affective arousal, an affective content of "affection," and a "participation and then belief" sequence, to a more revivalistic motif. The latter consists of a high degree of social pressure, short temporal duration, high level of affective arousal, an affective content of love and fear, and a "participation and then belief" sequence.

Thus, while perhaps bearing a few marks of its earlier participation in the Jesus Movement, this group now appears to be in the process of returning to a ministry more fully consonant with the tradition of tent evangelism found within American Pentecostalism. The older Jesus Movement-influenced emphasis upon community and personal spiritual growth has declined, taking with it the former concern for devotions, communitarian spirit, and personal growth of the participants within the ministry. In its place has appeared a more single-minded ministry with a greater concern for saving large numbers of souls than with the building of interpersonal relationships within the group. It seems likely that members of this branch of CITA are viewed more as future missionaries and staff members than as parishioners.

Such changes may have come about partially as the result of a decrease in the size of the ministry. In 1974, the ministry was composed of some 250 persons, while in 1987 the nominal size was seventy. As of 1990 this number is fluctuating at around forty to fifty or less. This decrease in size probably played a substantial role in the loss of the "family" organization.

Another factor that may be influential is the high turnover rate of persons within this particular branch of the world-wide CITA ministry. Except for the Lowerys, few of the members have been with the ministry for a long time period, and most members are too young to have participated in the original Jesus movement; persons that have been with the ministry for a substantial period of time have long since been sent overseas to act as missionaries.

Within the group, one's faith appears to have become largely privatized. While Lowery is regarded by members of the group as a powerful speaker of truth, his busyness as a result of his duties both to this particular group and to the world-wide ministry may impair extensive contact between himself and members of the group. Similarly, the group also appears to have few, if any, mechanisms for socialization of members. The ministry's tendency to send persons abroad as quickly as possible appears to prevent the development of intragroup mentorships developing between older and newer members. In spite of the group's revivalistic and conversionist stance, one receives a strong impression that new members are expected to arrive "pre-converted" and already possessing a substantial knowledge about both scripture and Christian ethics.<sup>(62)</sup> One member questioned about this situation responded:

I think at one time it used to be that . . . they joined up after they got saved--but I haven't seen it much. This ministry isn't too good for people who are nearly saved, really, because it is hard--really hard. It's hard for an average or a strong Christian; it's hard for them to stay with the group and grow. It's not too good for most Christians.

The reorientation of this branch of CITA has not been without effects. A number of persons with whom this investigator spoke voiced varying degrees of frustration with the ministry. Although frustrating circumstances are often considered to be the results of demonic attacks against God's servants and as being the result of temporal proximity of the end times, feelings of frustration result in morale problems which may impede recruitment and hasten the departure of group members. If this trend continues, a crisis point will be reached in which Bill Lowery will have to bring people from either El Paso or abroad to act as staff, unless some other provisions can be made. Such an event may cause a further move toward the "professionalization" of this group.<sup>(63)</sup>

## CONCLUSION

This paper provides only a cursory look at the mother branch of the Christ is the Answer ministry; as a result the findings presented here must be regarded as preliminary. One question of considerable importance that has yet to be answered is the question of how typical this particular group is in respect to the other groups, the latter of which may still be more "affectional" than revivalistic. Within this particular group, other questions remain as well: How typical are Bill and Sara Lowery's attitudes in relation to the rest of the group? How intentional was the group's move from an affectional motif of conversion to that of a more revivalistic one? How central a role does the book, True Discipleship, play in the life of the community? Is the daily life of the members as austere as would seem to be indicated here? Is the frustration voiced by the members interviewed during this study typical of the whole group?

What proportion of the U.S. group ultimately goes abroad, and what proportion simply defects?

During the course of research of the present paper, the author secured an invitation to travel with Bill Lowery's mobile group; the author also received an invitation to visit the CITA headquarters and ministry in El Paso, Texas. Making use of such opportunities should aid in the formation of a clearer picture of CITA, especially in regard to questions about life within the other communities, the beliefs of the members, the implementation of doctrine, and the history of the organization. It is also hoped that such endeavors will also aid in finding an answer to a larger question: what ultimately happened to the Jesus Movement?

## REFERENCES

1. Robert W. Balch, "What's Wrong With the Study of New Religions and What We Can Do About It," Scientific Study of New Religions: Divergent Perspectives, ed. Brock K. Kilbourne (San Francisco: AAAS, 1985), cited by Thomas Robbins, Cults, Converts, and Charisma (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1988) 16.
2. Space constraints prevent the examination of all of Balch's criteria within this paper. This work will concentrate primarily upon historical development, belief systems, leadership and social organization, and relationship of members to outsiders. Economic practices, material culture, patterns of everyday life, sexual patterns, child rearing, deviance and social control, recruitment techniques, commitments and sacrifices required of members, socialization techniques, conversion patterns, and defection patterns will be dealt with only peripherally.
3. David E. Harrell, All Things Are Possible (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1975) 7-9, 135-49.
4. Ultimately it is hoped that the completed study might be a companion of a prior study by the present author (John M. Bozeman, "Jesus People, U.S.A.: An Examination of an Urban Communitarian Religious Group," thesis, Florida State University, 1990, passim).
5. Ronald M. Enroth, Edward E. Ericson, and C. Breckinridge Peters, The Jesus People: Old Time Religion in the Age of Aquarius (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1972) 12.
6. Such beliefs include belief in the virgin birth of Christ, Jesus's bodily resurrection, the existence of miracles, and the inerrancy of, or at least the prime authority of, the Christian scriptures (David F. Gordon, "A Comparison of the Effects of Urban and Suburban Location on Structure and Identity in Two Jesus People Groups," diss., University of Chicago, 1978, 41; Jack Balswick, "The Jesus Movement: A Sociological Analysis," Religion American Style, ed. Patrick H. McNamara [New York: Harper and Row, 1974] 360).
7. Balswick 360.
8. Enroth, Ericson, and Peters 16.
9. Robert Lynn Adams and Robert Jon Fox, "Mainlining Jesus: The New Trip," Society 9 (Feb. 1972):

50-6.

10. Frequently communes would come into being, both for utilitarian reasons such as drug rehabilitation and provision of housing for a large number of persons on a limited budget, and also for the purpose of fostering a deeper commitment to the Christian way of life (Enroth, Ericson, and Peters 207-8).

11. Lowery and his wife had been Methodists prior to their conversion experience (Bill Lowery, telephone interview, 18 July 1990).

12. Sara Lowery, personal interview 7 Sept. 1990. The "job" referred to by Ms. Lowery is the evangelization of the world.

13. This commune has been founded by Jim Palosaari during the same year. For a more complete history of the Jesus People, Milwaukee commune, see Bozeman 32-8; also see Cardell K. Jacobson and Thomas J. Pilarzyk, "Faith, Freaks, and Fanaticism: Notes on the Growth and Development of of the Milwaukee Jesus People," ms. of paper read at the annual meetings of the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion, Boston, Oct. 1972, 3-4; Cardell K. Jacobson and Thomas J. Pilarzyk, "Croissance, developpement, et fin d'une secte conversioniste: les Jesus People de Milwaukee," *Social Compass* 21 (1974): 255-8.

The Milwaukee commune also gave rise to the Jesus People U.S.A. commune of Chicago as well as to the Highway Missionaries (now the Servent Community of Cincinnati). Jesus People U.S.A. will be dealt with below.

14. Bill Lowery, "From Christ is the Answer's Founder-Director Bill Lowery" (n.p.: n.p., n.d.) N. pag. While this document bears no date, it appears to have been written in 1987.

15. Lowery, "Founder-Director."

16. Chriss Liden, telephone interview, 13 December 1990. Liden has been with the group since 1973 and, unlike most other CITA members of long duration, has spent most of this time in the United States. Presently he is the director of El Paso branch of the ministry.

17. Liden, interview.

18. Lowery, "Founder-Director."

19. Lowery, "Founder-Director"; "Christ is the Answer," (Benevento, Italy: n.p., n.d.) n. pag.

20. "Ministries Update," *Frontline*, March/April 1989: 4.

21. Lowery, "Founder-Director."

22. "Christ is the Answer Border Ministry" (n.p.: n.p., n.d.) n. pag. The border ministry appears to be CITA's major effort within the realm of poverty and relief work, an effort that began with the modest intent of taking a few bags of groceries to destitute families and widows in Juarez, Mexico. This effort rapidly grew, however; officially organized in 1985, by 1988 the border ministry had distributed 3.6 million pounds of food, clothing, and medical supplies in El Paso, Appalachia, Juarez, the Honduras, Haiti, Peru, and Soviet Armenia. A Juarez children's feeding ministry also developed from this CITA branch, as well as an effort to distribute pre-fabricated shelters. In addition to relief work, the border

ministry also labors to "share the Gospel" through holding street meetings and witnessing efforts; the group also claims to cooperate with other churches and ministries, "standing together against the unfruitful works of darkness, such as pornography and abortion."

23. "Christ is the Answer in Portugal," (Alpiarca, Portugal: n.p., n.d.) n. pag. This flyer appears to have been produced in 1989.

24. Lowery, "Founder-Director."

25. Bill Lowery, telephone interview.

26. Lowery, telephone interview.

27. Lowery, telephone interview.

28. Lowery, telephone interview.

29. Sara Lowery, interview.

30. Bill Lowery has claimed that CITA relies totally upon outside donations (Lowery, telephone interview), a view which Sara Lowery confirmed by Sara Lowery and Chriss Liden (Sara Lowery, interview; Chriss Liden, interview). Conversations with other members of the group may call this into question. At one point, female members of the ministry were engaged in sewing pillows, apparently for the purpose of being sold; another person claimed to be a truck driver who occasionally performed secular jobs on the ministry's behalf. Further investigation appears necessary to completely understand the ministry's sources of support.

31. At present there are roughly six families in the group. Such families are said to support themselves through the sponsorship of home congregations.

The ministry makes provision for the education of children within the group; there is one teacher who uses a curriculum prepared by the Christian Liberty Academy of Arlington Heights, Illinois.

32. Sara Lowery, interview.

33. This schedule was compiled from both site observation and interviews.

34. Sara Lowery, interview.

35. Liden, telephone interview.

36. Mixed bathing is permitted but generally avoided.

37. Excepting the Lowerys and Chriss Liden, the names of the participants within the group have been omitted for the sake of anonymity.

38. Sara Lowery, interview.

39. Sara Lowery, interview.

40. William MacDonald, True Discipleship, (Kansas City, Kansas: Walterick Publishers, 1975) 4.
41. MacDonald 6-9.
42. MacDonald 6.
43. MacDonald 6-7.
44. MacDonald 7. MacDonald notes the extreme nature of some of his suggestions: "The author realizes that in the act of setting them forth [the terms of Christian discipleship], he has condemned himself as an unprofitable servant. But shall the truth of God be forever suppressed because of the failure of God's people? Is it not true that the message is always greater than the messenger? Is it not proper that God be true and every man a liar? Should we not say with an old worthy, 'Thy will be done though in my own undoing' (MacDonald 9-10)."
45. MacDonald 72.
46. Lowery, telephone interview.
47. Chriss Liden, "The Bridegroom Cometh," Frontline August/September, 1988: 2.
48. "The Last Call," Frontline August/September, 1988: 7.
49. "Is the Midnight Hour Here?" (n.p.: n.p., March 1990) n. pag.
50. "Is the Midnight Hour Here?"
51. One unexpected finding in this study was that a sizable number of Christ is the Answer team come from at least nominally Catholic backgrounds. These persons tend to have a rather dim view of Catholicism. While the high proportion of Catholics present in the organization may simply be a random event, a future study, if undertaken, will investigate this.
52. Harvey Cox has noted that among persons involved with totalistic religions of Eastern origin, answers to queries as to why one originally joined become more formulaic the longer the devotee has been involved (Harvey Cox, Turning East [New York: Simon and Schuster, 1977] 95). It is possible that a similar process of self-revision of personal history has occurred among members of this group; however, this hypothesis could not be tested as the investigator encountered no recent recruits except for one female visiting from the El Paso offices.
53. One possible exception to this was the member's insistence upon drawing a distinction between "knowing the Lord" and "religion." The former term is used to describe the desirable state of having a personal experience of God, of having a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, and of having experienced the work of the Holy Spirit in one's life. Such states are considered to be authentic acts of God. The term religion, on the other hand, is used to indicate religious institution as well as human efforts to know and/or please God. Though CITA members feel that a person can be "saved" and belong to an organized church, such institutions and personal efforts are regarded with a profound suspicion.
54. Lowery at times refers to the group as "the last of the hippies (Bill Lowery, telephone interview)." Note also Sara Lowery's response to a question about CITA's past relationship to the Jesus Movement:

It was a time. It was just a time, a phase. . . . What happened was that the Church didn't want them (Sara Lowery, interview).

The exact relationship between Jesus People U.S.A. and CITA is somewhat problematic. Some of the Jesus People U.S.A. members feel that while the overseas groups are doctrinally sound, the U.S.-based portion of CITA has become doctrinally questionable. Dawn Herrin, an elder and foundress of Jesus People U.S.A., has stated that Bill Lowery "was never in Jesus People." However, an issue of the Milwaukee Jesus People's magazine Street Level contains an article from the Davenport Times-Democrat stating that Lowery was in fact a member (Street Level, [n.d.] n.p.).

55. Robert S. Ellwood, Jr., One Way: The Jesus Movement and Its Meaning (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1973) 18-20.

56. Harrell 103, 107-12.

57. Harrell 146-9; Bozeman 34.

58. This branch of CITA does at present have two elders below Lowery, one in charge of all the unmarried males and one for unmarried females (both elders are male). However, their position appears to be extremely subordinate to Lowery, perhaps because of his greater experience. In spite of having little if any official standing, Sara Lowery also appears to act as a supervisor at times.

59. Liden, telephone interview.

60. Gordon 21, 71; Jacobson and Pilarzyk 5.

61. John Lofland and Norman Skonovd, "Conversion Motifs," Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion 20 (1981): 373-85; see also John Lofland and Rodney Stark, "Becoming a World-Saver: A Theory of Conversion to a Deviant Perspective," American Sociological Review 30 (1965): 862-75; Robbins 67.

62. This may represent a switch from "participation and then belief" to a "belief and then participation" sequence.

63. On the other hand, such a move might also bring back more of the older communitarian, affectional spirit that appears to have existed within the group at an earlier period; Bill Lowery would no longer have a monopoly on evangelistic experience, thus permitting more delegation of authority and perhaps allowing for a diversification of roles to take place within the group.