



Children of Jesus and Mary: The Order of Christ Sophia

James Lewis, Nicholas Levine

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The Order of Christ Sophia (OCS) is a small New Religion which, in the short span of eight years, has evoked intense controversy. An unusual synthesis of traditional Catholicism, esoteric cosmology, and psychology, the OCS already has centers in a dozen major cities in the United States. Thus far, however, it has eluded the attention of scholars of alternative religions. An offshoot of an earlier group, the Holy Order of MANS, the OCS developed a distinctive set of beliefs and practices that set it apart from the mother faith. It has cultivated some curious and provocative features for a Christian-based religion, including the elevation of women to full participation and status within the evolving sacred order. Its treatment of gender is refreshingly egalitarian; women can be priests, and Mary is deified and given equal status with Jesus. Another unusual feature of the group is its emphasis on introspection and intensive psychological and emotional work for all members. Beyond surveying the history, doctrines and practices of this unusual group, Lewis brings data from his study of the OCS to bear on many items of conventional wisdom in the New Religions field. He shows, for example, that far from joining the Order in response to a 'youth crisis,' the average age of new OCS members is 37. This and a number of other characteristics of the OCS membership challenge generally accepted conclusions about recruits to New Religions. Lewis also examines how various theoretical models, such as Rodney Stark's influential model of religious 'success,' pan out when applied to the OCS. In addition to the six core chapters of the book authored by Lewis, three other experts contribute chapters on: the results of personality and I.Q. tests administered to member; membership attitudes; comparison of OCS with mainstream denominations; and sex roles in the OCS.

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