

RELIGION

HELEN BAYLOR

Helen Baylor has seen and experienced from the bottom to the top, and, by the grace of God, lived to tell and sing of it all. Her last album and video, *The Live Experience*, catapulted her for the first time to the top of the contemporary Christian charts and saw her return to familiar territory as well, holding the top #1 spot on the Billboard Gospel charts under virtual lock and key for months.

Featuring 11 of her best loved songs, and a compelling personal testimony, it succeeded in making Helen a household name in Christian music. And with her newest release, *Love Brought Me Back*, the music and the message only grew stronger.

"The success of the *Live Experience* doubled, and even tripled the size of our audiences," Helen explains, "but that just made me want to seek to do an even better job of what I do...to really reach those people and let them know all that God has brought me through and hope that might help them in their own lives. I'm all for good, wholesome, Christian entertainment, but I've got a calling on my life to go further—to reach into people's hearts and touch and be touched by who and where they are. That's just the



into much more than the brilliantly produced and performed project that it is. With a stellar roster of Los Angeles' finest musicians, powerful

songs and Helen's vocals—both commanding and caressing—it's still the heart behind the music that speaks most powerfully.

"There were so many moments when it was just me alone with that microphone," Helen recalls, "and it was nothing but the Holy Spirit carrying things to a level beyond anything I could achieve on my own. We did a version of 'Amazing Grace,' and on my vocal intro a sound came out that was straight from my childhood in the Pentecostal church. I couldn't replicate it now if I tried. It just poured out."

"On 'The Lord Is My Shepherd,' my voice was scratchy and a little tired, but as I sang, the true meaning of that scripture just began to well up within me. By strict standards, the performance could be called less than perfect, but the anointing was there and powerful. You can be technically perfect all day long, but that anointing—the hand of God—is a gift and you don't treat it lightly. You receive it humbly and gratefully."

"I thank God for the favor He shows, but Scripture says that we should never become respecters of persons," Helen concludes. "And I never want people looking at me like I'm any different."

Cardinal Joseph Bernardin leaves Portland

Chicago The Vatican has replaced the late Cardinal Joseph Bernardin with a Chicago native who could prove to be more outspoken on Roman Catholic doctrine than his predecessor.

Archbishop Francis E. George, 60, of Portland, Ore., will be installed as head of the nation's second-largest archdiocese May 7, six months after Bernardin's death from cancer.

Like Bernardin, George is in

line with the pope in opposing abortion, doctor-assisted suicide and the ordination of women. In Portland, he was a vigorous opponent of the state's law permitting euthanasia.

He also has shown a moderate streak. While bishop of Yakima, Wash., where he served from July 1990 until his appointment to Portland last April, he joined other Catholic leaders in opposing two anti-gay-rights initiatives.

Is the "Next Level" just an ABC Movie of the Week

Things are all right for the old Heaven's Gate bunch after all. The 39 cultists who left us to board the big spaceship behind Hale-Bopp had tried several times to make their own television movie; they wanted to spread the word about Do and Ti and The Level Beyond Human. Their movie never got made, although someone now will make it for them. It will be shown on ABC as a "movie of the week," and a cultist who left the Heaven's Gate compound before his friends all killed themselves will work on it as a consultant. They wrote to him before they died, asking him to go out and proselytize.

So far, he is not doing badly. Newsweek got him for an exclusive eight-hour interview, and featured him on the cover. Richard Ford, a.k.a. Rio DiAngelo, appears in a black turtleneck, his face and shaved head artfully lighted. "Secrets of the Cult," the cover says, although Newsweek had not found any worth sharing. Heaven's Gate did not practice exotic rituals, and its theology, such as it was, was soupy. Moreover, the cultists were not interesting people. They had fled from life, renouncing family, friends and sexuality long before they set out for the spaceship.

Nonetheless we have not heard the last of them. In life they had tried, and failed, to attract attention; in death, their hope is being realized. Even as Newsweek — and Diane Sawyer on "PrimeTime Live" — were fussing over Ford/DiAngelo, Time was reporting that other survivors of the cult no longer trusted him. Heaven's Gate now seems to be rent by a schism, and the other survivors have established their own Website. Its first offering — "Heaven's Gate Away Team Returns to Level Above Human in Distant Space" — carried greetings from Do, Ti and all the old gang. The webmaster told Time: "This will be an ongoing site for years to come."

Meanwhile, the press continues to look for meaning. What attracted

the cultists to the cult? One favorite theory holds that Marshall Applewhite, or Do, had been a victim of homophobia. An intolerant society had made him ashamed of his own sexual proclivity; therefore he founded the cult. Indeed the New Yorker warned that "repressed homosexuality" might mean there are "several million more Applewhites out there, roaming the earth in search of disciples."

Frank Rich offered a related theory in the New York Times: An empty society, even if not specifically homophobic, was at fault. "Here was a mass suicide suitable for Better Homes and Gardens," he wrote, and pointed out that the cultists had been living in an upscale California suburb. Americans yearn to live in places just like that, he said, but when they do they find them sterile and hollow. Therefore the suicides represent the death of the American dream.

And so on, and so on, along with many stories about contemporary spirituality and longings to find a faith. None seem to have pointed out, though, that court decisions and government rules have done their best to remove religion from public life. Kids can't pray in school, while judges can't post the Ten Commandments in chambers, and no one can put up a cross or a Menorah in a public place. Meanwhile, "mainstream," socially acceptable religious organizations continue to confuse faith and liberal politics. Witness almost any pronouncement by the National Council of Churches.

Perhaps we should not be so surprised then by the emergence of cults and cultists. Heaven's Gate may have been delusional, but it helped to fill a void. When God is banished from the public square, it is easier for people like Do and Ti to step in. Moreover, their ideas may outlive them now, and attract new believers. Look to the Web, and wait for the ABC movie. What do you expect?

Faith, Mysticism, & Money

The Hale-Bopp comet glowed in the sky above Manila Bay, but the 50,000 ecstatic Christian followers of Brother Mike paid it no heed. Flying saucers were the last thing on their minds. Their reward was here and now: good jobs, good health, good marriages, and, best of all, money.

At the high point of the rally on a vast fairground beside the bay, thousands of people lifted their open wallets and bank books to the heavens to receive financial blessings from the Philippines' most popular evangelist, Mariano Velarde, known as Brother Mike.

Some raised their passports in hopes of a job abroad.

"Do you believe that without documents you can go to the United States with the help of Brother Mike?" said a worshiper named Nene Arreliano. "I do."

Evangelical movements are sweeping this largely Roman Catholic nation, with its undercurrent of pre-Christian mysticism and ritual, but never has the Philippines seen a movement grow so fast and claim so many followers.

Founded a decade ago by Velarde, 57, a real-estate developer with a religious radio program, the movement known as El Shaddai — a Hebrew name for God — has a following estimated at 5 million.

It is a religion of its time, when the Philippines is just beginning to join the economic growth spurt of its Southeast Asian neighbors.

"Mike Velarde is a new kind of prophet, a prophet of financial capitalism," said Alex Magno, a political scientist. "This is a religion in the age of portfolio investment."

Brother Mike preaches

Its base, he said, is among the 700,000 overseas workers who are the nation's leading earners of foreign exchange, sending home \$8 billion to \$10 billion a year. El Shaddai has chapters in some 30 countries where Filipinos are employed as maids, entertainers, and construction workers.

It is a solid financial foundation for a religious movement that asks its followers not only to donate 10 percent of their earnings but also to offer additional "seed money" that will help them reap great financial returns.

"Remember this: whoever sows (gives) sparingly will also reap (receive) sparingly, and whoever sows (gives) generously will reap (receive) generously," an El Shaddai pamphlet says, quoting from the Bible.

The transactions are straightforward. Donation envelopes at the rally include a space on which a worshiper can describe the reward he hopes for.

"I call it transactional spirituality," said Randy David, a Philippine sociologist. "You get something for your spirituality: a visa, a job abroad, or maybe you get cured of an illness or you win your wife or your husband back if they are alienated."

It is a transaction that Velarde happily acknowledges he is engaged in himself. His literature tells and retells his personal story of real-estate investments that paid off, after a period of travail, thanks to his faith.

"He used to sell real estate," David said. "I think he has found it more

lucrative to sell religion."

Like some American evangelists who collect large donations, Velarde has come under fire here for his financial dealings.

He has been criticized by the Philippine Securities and Exchange Commission for irregularities in stock offerings from companies he controls, and a former associate has accused him of embezzling millions of dollars in El Shaddai funds.

Velarde turns these setbacks into grist for his sermons, incorporating them into the personal narrative that is his central parable of hardships overcome.

It is a pattern he teaches to his followers. His rallies are punctuated by the "testimonies" of believers who say El Shaddai has changed their lives.

"I had a heart attack, I lost my business, and my husband left me," said a member of the crowd, Cecilia Rene. "But the Lord took care of that. Now I have a good business, my husband is with me, and I have a healthy body."

Kate Wiegele, an American anthropologist who has studied El Shaddai, said these narratives follow a pattern set by Velarde's own personal story and are at the heart of the movement's appeal.

"People learn to re-read their lives in terms of a before and an after," she said. "When you analyze their stories it is not clear whether their lives are actually better than before. Sometimes the narrative may not completely fit but they feel like it fits. It

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Obituary

Lorraine Marie Olive "Cookie"

Lorraine Marie Olive was born January 24th 1960 in Portland, Oregon. The daughter of Herbert Hoover Olive, deceased, and Martha Van Arsale, Lorraine was found dead behind a dumpster in San Diego, California on April 3, 1997. Cause of death is still pending.

Funeral Services were held in Portland, Oregon at the Sharon Seventh-day Adventist Church. Lorraine attended Sabin & Atkinson Elementary School. She was Atkinson's first black student body president. She entered high school at the age of 12 years old. Lorraine attended John Adams High School. She also received her paramedic license and nursing certificate. Lorraine mastered everything she put her heart into.

Instead of flower donations a Lorraine Marie Olive trust fund for her two daughters, Laricka and Chere Coxeff, was set-up at the U.S. Bank of Washington Cascade Park, account number 2461043057.

She is survived by two daughters, Laricka Coxeff and Chere Coxeff. Her mother Martha Van Arsdale Beltran. Her step-father, Florentino Beltran. Step-brothers Rubi, Eddie & Florentino Beltran. Her sisters, Balinda Bowman, Diane Bergman and brother John L. Olive all of Vancouver, Washington. Her brother Herbert Hoover Olive, Jr. of Portland, Oregon, and brother Brian Lockhart of Kent, Washington. Her brother Bobby "Robert" Lewis Olive preceded her in death on December 4, 1985. He was Oregon's first heart transplant donor.



"How should I pray?"

Rick Hamlin offers an engaging, funny, and touching tale of one man's lifelong pursuit of the answer to the question, "How should I pray?" in *Finding God on the A Train*. A fresh and fluent new voice on the Christian writing scene, Hamlin offers the candid story—sure to appeal to the millions today rediscovering the joy of prayer—of his search for an authentic spirituality.

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