

Twelve Tribes raid sparked by secret video [RELIGION](#)

By [DANIEL JAMES DEVINE](#)

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An undercover video recording prompted police to stage [last week's raid](#) of The Twelve Tribes sect in Germany, in which they took custody of 40 children, including a girl who was just visiting. Earlier this year, an investigative journalist from RTL infiltrated the Christian communal group by pretending to be spiritually lost, then secretly recorded 50 spanking episodes, according to [The Independent](#).

In one video, a middle-aged woman leads a boy about 4 years old into a cellar and demands, "Say you are tired!" When he refuses, she proceeds to spank him 10 times with a willow cane, until he says, through tears, "I am tired." Within a few hours, five other children are also spanked.

One German official described the punishment in the recordings as "cold and systematic." Germany outlawed corporal punishment of children in 2000. After viewing the secret recordings, officials decided to launch an investigation and take custody of the children.

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The RTL journalist interviewed a 19-year-old former Twelve Tribes member named Sven who ran away from the community at 14. Sven said he was spanked for imitating an airplane and for wetting the bed: "They said I had lost control of myself. I was told I would die if I tried to escape. ... I was a child who was not allowed to be a child."

The picture of an abusive and repressive community contrasts with statements The Twelve Tribes has posted to its website, including one from woman who was a childhood friend of a community member.

“The children and young people in the community were quiet and balanced, no restless TV children,” [she wrote](#). “They live very close to nature with their own garden, own animals, they play musical instruments, handcrafts, weaving, pottery, carpentry, home theater and so on. ... The parents respond to their children calmly and deliberately, never [have I] seen them in anger. ... There is a stable relationship between parents and children, which is marked by the affection, kindness, and caresses of the younger children.”

A [neighbor](#) to the community said the children seemed friendly, happy, and healthy. She sometimes saw the children taking walks or heard them playing volleyball. “You can see that the children are playing, they are happy and free, and nobody who has his senses together would have the idea to call this an isolated 'cult.' There is not even a fence.”

The Twelve Tribes also posted two [eyewitness accounts](#) of the raids.



Daniel James Devine

Daniel is a reporter for WORLD who covers science, technology, and other topics in the Midwest from his home base in Indiana. Follow Daniel on Twitter [@DanJamDevine](#).

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