

5 Truths about the sinister Twelve Tribes cult

Huffington Post
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May 19, 2014
Translated from the German

Its members live in communes somehow invisible, almost next door to us – and yet in a very different world. The talk is of the Twelve Tribes sect. They see themselves as extremely Bible-based and in the tradition of early Christians. This leads to a stark lifestyle in many ways and often law breaking for most people.

The seemingly inconspicuous community has suffered increased public scrutiny and piece by piece its questionable practices have suffered from public criticism.

The Twelve Tribes stand accused of misusing the Bible and twisting the Scriptures says Axel Seegers who is responsible for ideological matters in the Archdiocese of Munich. Wolfgang Behnk, the cult commissioner of the Evangelical Church in Bavaria says: "The sect has taken on hierarchical authoritarian submission, social isolation and disciplinary repression."

Here are five truths about the "Twelve Tribes":

1. The Twelve Tribes live strictly according to the rules of the Old Testament. Elders and deacons rule over the members and make decisions for them. The male manager call themselves shepherds and the ordinary members are called sheep. Men are clearly superior to women.

2. Children cannot attend public schools in order to protect them from the influences of the modern world.

Just last week the Twelve Tribes resisted compulsory education for their children dividing the religious community due to truancy. They published their comments in their Blog.

In 2004, the authorities in Bavaria tried to enforce compulsory imprisonment. Then they allowed the sect its own private school, but withdrew approval last year.

3. The "brothers" and "sisters" must work long and hard and they are not paid and they do not own personal property. They reject health insurance and social services.

4. The "Twelve Tribes" believe in corporal punishment as a legitimate means of education. Last year, an RTL – reporter filmed with hidden cameras sect members beating children with the rod. The District Office Donau-Ries said that it received "recent indications of significant and lasting child abuse from sect members."

After the courts provisionally removed the parents custody, the police swooped into the community in a large scale operation removing 40 children from the sect. Most now live in homes and foster families.

The discipline begins in infancy. With the help of safety pins, babies are so tightly wrapped in cloths that they can no longer move. Eventually the fidgeting and screaming stops, said the former member.

Another describes the Twelve Tribes cult:

"I was beaten every day at school. If the student is not quick with mental arithmetic or perhaps they are just not sitting at their desk then the "teacher" sends them into the next room! The "teacher" has described this nicely: "You fell into the mud and must take a shower."

5. Several times a week, all members gather in a large room to rehash and talk about the teachings of the cult leader Elbert Eugene Spriggs. Even the little children must listen attentively for hours. Individual thinking and individuality are undesirable. They see that Satan possesses the outside world and that it is a corrupt influence, they say. Salvation can only be found in the community according to them.

Members of the "Twelve Tribes" are cut off from access to newspapers, libraries, the Internet and radio. The only information the sheep receive is what the shepherd chooses to feed them.