

THE BLOOMBERG CULT

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INTRODUCTION

For a more detailed theological study of this cult please refer to an excellent paper by Prof J.P.J. Theron of the Department of Practical Theology at UNISA. The paper is: *When a "Word of Prophecy" becomes "The Word of God", some keys to an understanding of the Mission Church, Lester (Israel), Bloomberg and his followers.* (Jacques Theron: Missionalia, Vol 21 no 3, pp 287 – 310).

This cult is one of the "personality cults" where a group of followers gather around a person who establishes himself as a "prophet of God". In the Bloomberg case he regards himself as the only true prophet of God, the only one who hears God's voice and that his preaching is the most important received from Jesus since the days of the apostle Paul (see Prof Theron's paper).

The essence of his preaching is that to qualify for the rapture (which is imminent) you have to live like he and his followers do, namely sell everything you own, stop all your activities (e.g. studies, work) and wait for the rapture. Through this earning of one's salvation he denies the essence of the true gospel that Jesus saves by grace through faith plus nothing! (Ephesians 2 : 8).

The Bible is no longer the basis of Bloomberg's teaching but God's latest revelation namely his voice. This "voice" talks to him and his followers through dreams and visions and guides them. While in this cult the members receive dreams in a prolific quantity which subside once they break completely with the leader. This is a very crucial aspect of the cult and very demonic since the dreams required very dangerous acts and since Bloomberg alone was interpreting each person's dreams. In this way he could manipulate his followers.

They are not very active in recruiting since they believe that those who God wants to join them will find them and do so. While busking (making music) in the street they will give their testimony to an inquirer and "prophecy" to people to stop all activities and live like they do. Bloomberg will conduct Bible studies and inquirers will be discretely invited to these. Actually the cult deem themselves a very elite group and that not many would be willing to be part of the group. Members are also encouraged to give "Bible studies" but these are very strictly only Bloomberg's version which most often is a manipulation of Scripture to prove his own ideas and beliefs.

HISTORY

The predominant theme of the Bloomberg group is the imminent second coming of Jesus Christ preceded by judgment upon South Africa, the world and upon all "unbelievers" meaning all non-members. Only Bloomberg's bible teaching and interpretation proves the way to be raptured and escape the imminent persecution for end time events according to his timetable. His teaching is totally judgmental, without love of the concept of grace. It flows from pride and arrogance, chief characteristics of the Bloomberg personality. All other Christians, Christian leaders and churches are false, already judged and destined for hell.

This teaching is conducted in a typical mind control environment. For this reason the combination of the general mind control techniques with false religious teaching has in the Bloomberg cult created the most dangerous situation imaginable. Group members are totally trapped. To comprehend this desperate situation the application of the general mind control techniques to Bloomberg's religious doctrines must be comprehended.

In 1986 Lester Bloomberg established the headquarters of his so-called "Mission Church" in Brookhouse, Pretoria. His followers were required to give up families, parents, work and studies and reside at Brookhouse. The number ranged from 40 to 50 until 1987 when Bloomberg disappeared from South Africa. A rigidly controlled environment and schedule under the autocratic rule of Bloomberg was maintained. Overseas bases were established in Switzerland at Churn and later at Bergün since 1990. Since 1994 he operates from Cape Town after his deportation by the Swiss Government. As almost all his Brookhouse brethren rejected Bloomberg after his disappearance from Pretoria in 1987, new members were recruited from South Africa and Europe. His membership now totals 10 – 15 living in the Cape area in between "missionary" travels elsewhere in Europe and Africa. The so-called "Delmas cult" developed out of the Bloomberg cult and is lead by a group of the original "Brookhouse brethren". They stayed loyal to Bloomberg after 1988 when the prophecies did not materialise and most Brookhouse followers turned against Bloomberg.

The cult started when so-called “missionaries” were sent out from Brookhouse and Switserzerland with specific instructions to proclaim God’s judgments and prophecies over those lands. No financial support was given and missionaries were expected to live in faith. Many ex-members tell tales of deprivation, hunger and disillusionment. In the travels, including Bloomberg’s own excursions into Russia, no provision is made for legal travel documents. The “missionaries” are assured that God will provide. In this way many illegal journeys by young people have and are taking place. No recourse is provided for possible detection and in one case imprisonment on discovery was lauded as martyrdom for Jesus. In a number of cases members travelled under false names. Lester himself adopted a new name, name “Israel Bloomberg”.

Interpersonal relationships are rigidly controlled. Homes and parents are totally cut off and forbidden and no communication is allowed. Examples of Bloomberg’s manipulations and instructions to achieve this is illustrated in his letters to cult members.

Members have to regularly confess personal and communal sins for which they are severely reprimanded and in Bergün were punished by Bloomberg by having to perform additional tasks in the household. The total effect of this is a totally loveless community where punishment and judgment are dominant. Often “disobedient” followers are “cut off” and then live in the streets without resources, until they repent and return to the fold.

Evidence by previous members at Brookhouse and subsequent information shows that large sums of money have been donated to Bloomberg. One person that we know gave all of his pension money to Bloomberg and today is destitute without any income. Many sold their houses and other property under pressure and gave the money to Bloomberg. In one case a large sum of money was, at his request, lent to Bloomberg at Brookhouse. Despite promises by him it was never repaid. Evidence is sufficiently recorded. To support Bloomberg and the cult at its quarters in Bergün, and currently in Cape Town, members were forced to play musical instruments in the streets. These young people hitch-hike to the places when they busk. No part of moneys so earned are given to the musician and everything is paid to the house. All moneys are common property, controlled by Bloomberg or by subleaders appointed by him and individual members may only receive small amounts for bare personal necessities.

THOUGHT CONTROL

In true cult fashion, they believe that truth is what Bloomberg teaches. He interprets the Bible, and his teaching is the ultimate “Word of God”. He alone is the true teacher and prophet and all others are false prophets destined for hell and outer darkness. In his teachings Bloomberg stamped various Christian leaders of South Africa (Ed Robert, McCauly, Heyns) and foreigners like Billy Graham and Derek Prince as false prophets.

Bloomberg’s teaching is apocalyptic. He preaches the imminent return of Christ preceded by the *rapture for which only his followers will qualify!* He further elaborates and *adds prophecies and predictions* to Bible prophecies which all followers are required to accept without question and to believe and proclaim. In fact, non-members are denounced as serving “another Jesus” and hence will never see heaven. All of these prophecies of Bloomberg are accepted by his followers as “the Word of God” and are presented as such to others.

In other words, believing these prophecies becomes the only way to salvation. The perfect and completed work of redemption by Jesus Christ is this pushed aside. Moreover the fulfilment of his prophecies must precede all of the Biblical end time events.

Some of Bloomberg’s prophecies are the following:

Brookhouse people to return and repent to Bloomberg. Destruction of Welkom 18 April 1988. Coup d’etat by right wing (AWB) May 1988. All Jews removed from South Africa by Israeli Government after coup. Persecution of liberals/concentration camps (Bloomberg letter 3/3/88, Suffolk, England). Russian invasion 23 September 1988. Assassination of Margaret Thatcher. During the time of Gorbachev he predicted the next Soviet leader will be the anti-Christ. False prophet is Meier Kahane (since dead). Syria to attack Israel with “acid rain rockets” (1988). Israel will retaliate with atomic bombs. Dome of the Rock will fall 17 March 1988. Iran will go to war with Greece. Queen Elizabeth will die. Neil Kinnock will win the election and lead England to disaster.

The fact that none of these prophecies came about is countered by a change in time perception which ignores established time frames. These prophecies are not invalidated but simply advanced in time. In this way the Russian invasion of South Africa (predicted for 23 September 1988) is still fervently expected despite the total change of the world’s geo-political alignments since that date. Newspapers are scanned every day for signs of the

coming destruction of the town of Welkom of the last days. Then suddenly, in February 1994, Bloomberg contacted all his members to tell them he had a revelation that the prophecies were given by Satan. He was crying on the telephone from Bergün and seemed to repent, but this lasted only 3 days. He then proclaimed: "*The prophecies were false but nothing else has changed, we continue as before*".

Cult language and the clichés used to preach these false prophecies create an impregnable barrier between cult believers and outsiders and any information critical of the beliefs are blocked out. Any other reaction is unthinkable as it would obviously detract from Bloomberg's authority. Exposure to such critical reaction from outsiders causes a typical cult reaction. Members enter a hypnotic-like stance showing a blank, neutral expression blocking out any hearing or understanding. It is a frightening experience to see such a robot-like transformation in a young person's expression and stance when confronted by such criticism. This stance clearly demonstrates the belief that the member considers himself as being persecuted which paradoxically creates a satisfaction of now being a martyr for Jesus. Fellow members report about each other to Bloomberg either that a member was loyal during criticism or weak and compromising. This forms part of the strict control by the leader over subordinates.

EMOTIONAL CONTROL

Guilt and fear, as the major tools for manipulation and compliance, are patently clear in the Bloomberg cult. Guilt is kept alive through confession sessions of real or imagined sins and is followed by tongue-lashing the trespasser, either by Bloomberg himself, but more often by other members instructed to do so. These out-pourings of wrath and abusive words are feared by the "trespasser". Fear of hell is instilled, firstly to eliminate any contact with outside enemies (parents and churches) and secondly to keep the person "loyal" to the group and dependent on the leader. The most severe judgment is reserved for those who dare to establish contact with ex-members. Bloomberg is particularly severe in this respect, specifically in the prohibiting of any contact with his ex-Brookhouse brethren. To achieve this total isolation one of the most sacred instructions for Bloomberg is to never reveal his address or whereabouts to any outsider. Any means is justified to achieve this end. The result is that Bloomberg and his cult members hide and always operate in the greatest secrecy. Relatives and ex-members who divulged his address have been ex-communicated and declared enemies of God. In Bloomberg's case his obsession concerning the secrecy of his whereabouts probably has a more sinister meaning. His identity and South African travel documents, at the time, were most probably invalid and any exposure might have endangered his residence in Switzerland. (He has subsequently been deported from Switzerland).

Bloomberg is an expert in applying emotional pressure to keep members ensnared. Yet he denies forcing members to stay by saying that they do it because it is the will of Jesus for their lives. (Tape recording of a response by Bloomberg to a mother who in a letter pleaded with him to set her son free). In another case a young man, after severe scolding and punishment at Bergün, was eventually thrown out of the house in mid-winter without a cent in his pocket. He experienced intensive trauma requiring months of Christian support and love to recover.

Bloomberg even controls members at a distance by manipulating them through letters and tapes. They hide together (Pretoria, George, Cape Town and again Pretoria 1992 – 1993) in total secrecy. Parents only discovered where they were staying in a caravan camp and thereafter a disbanded house in Muizenberg after they left.

The most tragic consequence of Bloomberg's controls is *the total spiritual bondage* in which fine and sincere young people become emotionally controlled by him. All of them, in the greatest sincerity, wished only to serve Jesus and follow Him. Yet they were deceived by Bloomberg and are reduced to robots whose minds are totally controlled by him yet still believing that they are honouring their commitment to the Lord.

IDENTITY DESTRUCTION

Possibly the most frightening outcome of Bloomberg's mind control operation has been the total destruction of these sincere young peoples' identities. His immense pressure transforms them into robot-like *new identities totally foreign to the original personalities*. Soft-spoken, loveable and in most cases extremely intelligent young girls are transformed into hard, tongue-lashing, loveless and judgmental personalities with veiled eyes not only rejecting but also apparently even *hating* parents, relatives and previous friends. Without hesitation and with total conviction they lie and deceive to follow Bloomberg's instructions. Typical of a destructive cult they have become totally conformist without the will or the ability to maintain an identity or make their own decisions. They have become totally passive, live under harsh conditions, experience hunger and deprivation. They exhibit the very same characteristics of the "Hitler Jugend" (youth) regarding martyrdom. Yet they reject any approach and help by relatives and friends who are regarded as enemies of God and therefore as their enemies. It is particularly families and parents who suffer as a result of this heartbreaking chain of events instigated by Bloomberg, or should one

rather say by the forces of darkness which work through a person, in this instance, through Lester Bloomberg. One must keep in mind that all of this cannot be explained in any other way than on the spiritual level. One cannot blame a person. The person becomes the prey of Satan. The whole disaster originated in and is maintained on satanic supernatural level.

INFORMATION CONTROL

Bloomberg enforces total communication control even upon cult members away from him in South Africa. No books may be read, no television viewed, only Bible reading is allowed with Bloomberg's teachings as a guide. Only newspapers are allowed, probably to verify the outcome of Bloomberg's predictions. Bloomberg's manipulation is maintained by regular audio tapes and letters to cult members. Lengthy audio tapes provide Bible interpretation and together with letters transmit instructions. Wherever he deems it necessary, members are instructed to mete out punishment and judgment upon fellow members whose everyday movements are reported to him regularly. The most severe judgment is reserved for those who cause his letters to fall in the hands of outsiders.

Letters are mailed to *poste restante* addresses and are frequently changed to prevent him being traced and letters intercepted. Letters addressed by relatives to members are screened and in most cases destroyed or returned unopened to the senders. The same applies to gifts or other parcels to members. (Evidence of this is numerous). Flowers sent to congratulate on the birth of a baby were returned to the parents on the same day.

The style, tone and language of Bloomberg's letters are strange. Instructions and judgments abbreviated in a staccato mode or in incomplete sentences are dominant and are almost always prefaced by "The Word of the Lord to ..." or "from Israel Bloomberg, the true prophet of God". He adopted the style of Paul of the New Testament in some of his letters. This causes every letter of Bloomberg to be received in fear and trepidation. An analysis of Bloomberg's handwriting and style by an expert psychologist revealed clear indications of psychiatric abnormality and possible signs of brain dysfunction.

THE CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE

Battle of the Mind

According to the Bible the mind of man is a battlefield where Satan and his evil spirits contend against God and his commandments, hence against the believer. The Apostle Paul describes it in 2 Cor. 10 : 3 – 5. He states that we are involved in spiritual warfare. The weapons of the believer are not worldly but divine to destroy the enemy's strongholds of darkness.

The peril for the Christian is deception by false teaching causing loss of sovereignty of the will. Satan disguises himself as the angel of light to lead believers to receive a spirit other than the Holy Spirit and to serve another Jesus (2 Cor. 11 :4).

Man possesses a free will. God's intention is for man to serve Him through a positive choice of his free will. However, Satan aims at taking man's free will captive to force him into servitude and captivity. For that reason signs of abnormal actions are invariably manifestations of Satan's efforts to restrict or destroy man's mind. Satan is the thief and robber (Luke 8 : 12).

Signs of Satan's deceptions are a blank and a passive mind. This is also the aim of cult mind control. In contrast the principle of God is for man to actively serve Him and live within His love through grace in freedom. The basic distinction between the works of the Holy Spirit and the wicked spirits are that all supernatural revelations, visions and injunctions of the Holy Spirit are conferred when the believer's mind is fully active and able to determine whether it agrees with God's nature and the Bible.

Many symptoms betray the phenomena of a passive and therefore captive mind. The surest sign of a mind captivated by evil spirits is in the eyes. This is tragically evident among Bloomberg's followers. Their eyes become dazed, gazing unseeingly at another's face without blinking. The demonic strategy here is clear. It is a thought-stopping mechanism which blocks out hearing and understanding. Some ex-members confess that they became psychotic during their membership time as a result of all the pressure and hardship. Yet it is God's will and destiny that a believer's mind be unshackled from passivity to be renewed to cooperate with the Holy Spirit. Therefore the battle to free His children from the cult mind control is already won when fellow-Christians engage in the war armed with the armour which Paul so aptly describes (Eph. 6 : 10 – 20). There is no other way than through spiritual

warfare to free a person from the Bloomberg cult. No arguments or counselling had any effect.

It is also essential to discover what opening Bloomberg provided for Satan and his demons. This will reveal the demonic hold upon his followers. The answer is simple. The pride and arrogance of Bloomberg and his teaching opened the ground for Satan. This made him a rebel in God's eyes and opened the way for demonic powers to take possession and work through him. This is most clearly stated in Deut. 18 : 19 – 22 which also brands him as a false prophet. Yet he is too proud to relinquish his claims to being a false prophet and controlling people – turning them into zombies.

Further ground opened to Satan is Bloomberg's judgmentalism and lovelessness. His message only preaches doom and destruction devoid of God's grace and love. This is what causes the fear which now crushes his followers. They have been robbed from their freedom and joy in Jesus. This is totally contrary to the Bible. John says: *"There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love"* (1 John 4 : 15).

Satan, through Bloomberg, robs and oppresses the sheep. Yet Jesus says: *"I have come that they may have life, and have it abundantly"* (John 10 : 10). The religious spirit which controls Bloomberg is the evil one coming as *"an angel of light"* (2 Cor. 11 : 13 – 15). Thereby lovely, wonderful and sincere young people are trapped in deception and robbed of their joy and love in Jesus.

Loss of love and affection in the Bloomberg cult is frightening. The faculty of affection operating through the will sinks into total paralysis. The cult members behave like wood and stone, cold and dead to all affections. Love and affection by parents and relatives literally leave them stone cold.

Yet paradoxically the deceived welcomes the suffering and destitution his lovelessness causes. He believes he is suffering for the Lord and revels in so-called persecution. He conceives of himself as a martyr whereas in fact he is a victim. He glories in the sufferings, yet they constitute but symptoms of the adversary's entrenchment.

As previously pointed out, often the young ones who become trapped are genuinely sincere in their longing and commitment to walk with Jesus in a more meaningful way. They long, together with many devoted Christians, for more Holy Spirit power and commitment in the church, yet find it becoming more and more secularised, powerless and worldly with almost no expectation for the return of Jesus Christ. In Bloomberg they find a teacher concentrating upon eschatology and the end time events and who seems to offer all the answers and the power. Eventually by his false teaching and elaboration on Biblical prophecy and through mind and thought control and distortion of Biblical truth, he leads them into deception and entrapment.

ROAD TO FREEDOM

A believer falls into passivity through deception which in turn is again caused by a lack of knowledge. Therefore the first necessary step on the road to freedom is by learning the truth. Truth concerning the cause and nature of spiritual deception, the process of mind control, operation of evil spirits, supernatural manifestation and spiritual warfare provides the first step.

Since the descent was (1) deception, (2) passivity and mind control and (3) entrenchment, the way to release will initially be the uncovering of deception. Deception opens the gate for the evil spirits, passivity provides a place for them to stay and the result of these two is captivity.

Discernment must be developed to appreciate the basic differences between the works of the Holy Spirits and evil spirits. The former operates in freedom, the latter is recognised by force and compulsion upon a passive mind. Satanic lies bind but God's truths free.

The road to the rediscovery of God's truth varies. However, doubt is the prelude to truth. God will plant holy doubt which starts to reveal bondage and demonic oppression. In this way the lie of the enemy becomes exposed. Thus the steps become: (1) doubt about his present position, (2) acknowledgment of deception, (3) confession of it and (4) confirmation of deception by further enquiry as to why he was beguiled.

This will lead to discovery of the ground afforded to demonic powers. In the case of the Bloomberg cult it is religious pride, arrogance, judgmentalism and lovelessness which lead to passivity and the slavery of demonic mind control. Now the power of the will should be restored to escape from passivity, to resist the powers of darkness by becoming humble instead of proud, by understanding God's grace which admonishes the believer not

to judge and by again accepting the love of God in His Son, Jesus Christ. Ground relinquished to evil spirits through passivity and inactivity of the will is then recovered by (1) obeying God's will, (2) resisting the devil's will and (3) exercising his own will in collaboration with the Holy Spirit. In the Bloomberg cult members very often have doubts about the instructions of Bloomberg, his conduct and his beliefs. But it is absolutely forbidden to voice any doubts or oppose the leader's commands. Paradoxically this then becomes the only way to freedom. If a member voices a query, Bloomberg calls him a "rebel". A meeting follows and he is expelled and thus "on his road to hell". The same applies to a member who do not immediately obey a sometimes outrageous command, such as leaving at mid-night on foot without money to a far-off place. A member who was expelled after an impossible demand said: "Hell holds no threat for me after this". And she was free!

As in active warfare the deceived believer must issue his declaration to choose freedom and liberty, refuse to remain passive, exercise his will and use his own talent, refuse to be dominated and manipulated, know the wiles of the evil spirits, declare their defeat and sever every influence of the powers of darkness and oppose all their lies, deceptions and false teachings. Declare God's power and that of the blood of Jesus and the enemy will flee because Calvary already destroyed Satan and his evil hosts through the finished and perfect work of Jesus on the cross (Heb. 2 : 14, Col, 2 : 14 – 15).

In some cases, however, the reactivating of the person's own will and the release from demonic bondage must be strengthened by a process of deliverance. No general rule can be applied and every case must be treated according to the specific personality and circumstances and particularly by the revelation by the Holy Spirit as sought by the deliverer, fellow believers and Christian friends and relatives.

Safely back on the road to freedom, the mind will be set free to exercise its own free will, bringing it in line with God's will as revealed by the Holy Spirit.

In the Bloomberg cult some ex-members argue that certain facets of their experience in the cult was beneficial and of spiritual value. It is also these ex-members that believe Bloomberg will at some time in future rise to play some role as a spiritual leader again. It is said that one can notice that these people have problems in adjusting to life in general. Significantly those ex-members who have made a clean break with Bloomberg, turning their backs 100% on the cult experience declaring it totally false and demonically inspired, immediately straighten out their lives and return to pure Biblical truth.

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