

July 29, 1983

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN:

My son, Kevin, has been a follower of Bhagwan, leader of the Rajneesh community outside of Antelope, Oregon, for approximately five years, and a resident in the community for the past two.

Although Kevin was brought up in the Episcopal Church and both I and my husband are still active churchpeople in this denomination, I have come to respect those followers of Bhagwan whom I have come to know. I have also checked with my clergyman, who acknowledges that he has known of this movement in India, and its leader, for many years, and recognizes his charisma as a religious leader, despite some personal peculiarities reported from time to time in the press.

I have read some of Bhagwan's books and listened to tapes of his lectures, and while he has not dissuaded me from my more conservative religious persuasions, I must admit that the theme of universal love which he preaches appeals to many young people, like Kevin, for whom the established religions appear too dogmatic, too restrictive for their liking.

In May of this year, in connection with a conference which I attended in Portland, I drove to Antelope and the Rajneesh center to see for myself what was impelling my son and his wife to want to live there. What I saw was very impressive. I saw a site of incredible beauty that only a few months before had been an overworked sheep ranch, an environmental disaster. It was immaculately clean, even on a rainy muddy weekend. It was orderly, with a civil government of mayor, city hall, and peace (not police) department, a school, clinic, recycling plant, orchards, irrigated truck gardens, well designed poultry and cattle barns, recreation areas, carpenter shop, machine shop, bus transportation system, gas station, the beginnings of a small airport.

The bare overgrazed hills in which the community nestled were showing a cover of pale green grass. Neat prefabricated houses were located in such a way that they blended aesthetically with their settings. Grass patches and flower beds struggling for existence around them were being watered morning and night. In the dining hall where the residents ate their meals, the food was simple, but good and plentiful, most of it grown in the community gardens.

It was my impression that the persons living there were happy, healthy, free of signs of fanaticism, but strongly motivated

to make Rajneesh a model community and example of what society is capable of. Except that they were all wearing clothes in various shades of red and yellow, there was nothing peculiar about them. (Actually, even the monotony of red did not strike me as offensive; the clothing presented lively bits of moving color against the pale green hills, as you looked into the valley from a mountainside!). There were showers, modern plumbing, washing machines. Cleanliness and godliness were both present!

Kevin works, along with everyone else, from seven in the morning until seven at night, seven days a week, but he doesn't complain, for he feels he is building an ideal community in which people can live harmoniously with each other and with Nature. He wants to live there and bring up his son there -- and I respect him for it.

During my visit to Rajneesh, on a bus tour, when we were passing by the schoolhouse, one of the visitors asked the tour guide whether religion was taught in the school. The guide replied, "No, we don't teach religion, we just try to live it." And that is the feeling I came away with, after three days and nights in Rajneesh.

I saw Bhagwan only once during my visit. I'm told he tours the community once a day, a frail robed man with wispy hair and beard, seated in a well-publicized Cadillac. He raised a pale hand in greeting to his followers who had come from their various work places to greet him. They bowed their heads. That's all there was to it, but even as an outsider I was aware of the charge of energy that coursed through the crowd of mostly young people who lined the road. He was their leader, a very spiritual leader in which they and God of the universe were working together to make better people and a better world.

Although I am an Episcopalian, I do not feel that my chosen religious affiliation has a monopoly on the spiritual energy that impells us all to seek out what is good and eternal. I would not like to see this country or its various agencies make the decision on what is true religion and what is charlatanism. What I have seen working through my son and in the Rajneesh community is Bhagwan working as a powerful vehicle of religious thought and action for a small but vigorous spiritual and environmental/ethical movement. To separate Bhagwan from his followers now would be to uproot a source of spiritual power that is contributing in an unusual but important way to this nation and to this world. America has always been a nation of religious diversity: the Shakers, the Oneida Community, Amana, and Brook Farm. Good came from them all and will come from this newest offshoot of religious thinking.

Mrs. Leon McCauley