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Introduction to Presentation

**“Goodbye Mother: Children of Cults Leaving in Their Own
and Starting Over”**

Given the longevity of some of the cults that emerged between the 1950s and 1980s, we have learned more and more about second- and even third-generation “members” of those groups – that is, the offspring of those followers who joined the groups as adults. This presentation will highlight some of the issues related to being raised in a “self-sealing” (or cultic) group that typically (1) requires unquestioned adulation of a charismatic leader; (2) demands a high degree of conformity; (3) imposes behavioral, emotional, and sometimes physical constraints; and (4) is ruled by a closed (and most often, extremist) belief system or ideology. Not only did the children *not choose* to be in the group, but also they were raised to believe that there was no alternative worldview as well as having been taught to fear (and in some cases, hate) the “outside world.”

In line with the theme of this year’s conference “Women in Cults, Gurus and Victims,” my colleague on FECRIS’s Scientific Research Committee (English-Speaking Branch), Luigi Corvaglia, will begin with an overview of the relationship between mother and child – a core social

relationship and one that is regarded, in most societies at least, as fundamental to child development. He will note how that relationship can be affected when the mother is in a cult. This will be followed by a summary of my research findings. Data presented here are drawn from semi-structured interviews with 63 individuals who were born and/or raised from an early age in one of 39 different groups, ranging from Christian fundamentalist to New Age eclectic to Eastern meditation and others. I should like to note that this material will be expanded upon in a forthcoming book under the tentative title, “Escaping Utopia: Growing Up in a Cult, Getting Out, and Starting Over,” to be published in 2017 by Routledge, and will be written with my colleague and co-author Karla McLaren, M.A.