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With CBS News Correspondents  
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"HOLY SMOKE" - Produced by Jeanne Solomon

"THE PINK PANTHER" - Produced by Jim Jackson

"THE GREAT DEPRESSION" - Produced by Lucy Spiegel

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DAN RATHER: They call themselves the Ethiopian Zion Coptic Church. Their outraged neighbors and many law enforcement officials call them a fraud, a group of rich dopeheads who have been allowed to laugh at the law and get away with it. That's because the Coptics insist that marijuana, which they call by its Jamaican name, ganja, is their sacrament.

HENRY ADORNO (Florida Assistant State Attorney): If a court were to rule that the Coptics do have a First Amendment right, I, as a prosecutor, would then have to go around and decide who to arrest for possession of marijuana. They obviously would then come with the defense, "Well, I'm a Coptic," or "I am, you know, I believe that marijuana is my sacrament."

BROTHER LOUV (Coptic leader): Let's start from the beginning, page one of the Bible, Genesis, book one, verse 29: "Behold, I have given you every green herb bearing seed, which is upon all the face of all the earth. . ." Now, is there any dispute that marijuana is a green herb bearing seed that grows all over the earth?

MIKE WALLACE: I'm Mike Wallace.

SAFER: I'm Morley Safer.

RATHER: I'm Dan rather.

HARRY REASONER: I'm Harry Reasoner. Those stories and more tonight on 60 MINUTES.

(Announcements)

## "HOLY SMOKE"

**DAN RATHER:** One of the things we Americans have always accepted is that people have a right to practice their religion, no matter how unorthodox, without being molested by the law or by the rest of the community. But there's a church in Florida now that lawmen say is stretching that proposition a lot further than most people can accept, at least a lot further than they can accept.

The issue will be decided by a case before the Florida Supreme Court that could eventually wind up before the United States Supreme Court, and that issue is whether or not the state can prosecute members of a church who believe marijuana was given to them by God, and that smoking pot is for them a holy ritual. Our story begins on Star Island in the coastal waterway between Miami and Miami Beach.

Over the years, the people who've lived in this part of Miami Beach often have been famous, sometimes have been notorious, always have been wealthy. The Duke of Windsor, the abdicated King Edward VIII, often stayed with friends in the island neighborhood. Gangster Al Capone once had a not-so-small castle over there. But even Al Capone could not have disturbed his neighbors as much as have the current residents of Number 43, Star Island.

(Coptics chanting)

The call themselves the Ethiopian Zion Coptic Church, a religion these white Americans claim has its roots in black Jamaica. Their outraged neighbors and many law enforcement officials call them a fraud, a group of rich dopeheads who have been allowed to laugh at the law and get away with it. That's because the Coptics insist that marijuana, which they call by its Jamaican name, ganja, is their sacrament; as valid and as necessary to them, they say, as wine is to Catholics during communion.

These services take place three times a day, but the Coptics appear to partake of their sacrament just about all the time. Their leader here on Star Island is a six foot seven inch former Catholic from Boston named Thomas Reilly. He prefers to be known as Brother Louv.

**BROTHER LOUV:** Well, let's start from the beginning, page one of the Bible, Genesis, book one, verse 29: "Behold, I have given you every green herb bearing seed, which is upon all the face of all the earth. . ." Now, is there any dispute that marijuana is a green herb bearing seed that grows all over the earth?

**RATHER:** All right, let's— let's address ourselves to the truth. Is the basic message you should smoke ganja?

**BROTHER LOUV:** The basic message is you should stop your sin. When you and I are neighbors and I have the security that you are a man who keeps the commandments of God, then I know you're not going to rob me, you're not going to murder me, you're not going to covet me. So that's the only security that people can have is to stop their sinful ways, stop becoming homosexuals when they know what the Scripture says about homosexuality; they know what wisdom shows you about destroying your own seed of life. They should stop their abortion. They should stop their birth control. They should stop their oral sex, their hand sex, and any way that they're destroying their own life and their own seed life.

They should stop those things immediately. And they should have known to be smoking ganja from a long time. For how is it that I know too?

RATHER: The Coptic Church bought this house in 1975 for \$270,000, paid for in cash. It's a kind of luxury commune with about 40 members, but a commune that adheres to the Bible, Old and New Testament teachings; a kind of combination of Billy Graham fundamentalism and Kosher law. Though there is no formal marriage ceremony, the Coptic women must be faithful and subject to their husbands. But the women, and even the Coptic children, are encouraged to smoke marijuana, and that's where the trouble first started.

It was in early 1978 that the local Miami media began focusing in on activities of the Coptic Church. While it was the constant chanting and the smell of marijuana that upset close neighbors on Star Island, it was those scenes of Coptic children smoking marijuana on local television that brought protests from the city as a whole. Then in November, 1978, news broke of the mass deaths of the Peoples Temple cult in Jonestown, Guyana, and many Miami residents were shocked into wondering if they might not have a potential Jonestown on their doorstep.

BROTHER LOUV: I have no knowledge of Jim Jones except what I read in paper. And I read in the Bible that the wages of sin is death, and I understand he ran a homosexual, perverted, wife-swapping, adulterous, lecherous camp somewhere in the jungle, and that many of the people were murdered and some committed suicide, and I'm not the least bit surprised.

RATHER: Nevertheless, the furor caused by the Coptic Church's activities led the state attorney to take action against them. A civil action for public nuisance was brought against the Coptics, rather than a criminal charge for possession of marijuana. The state attorney's office had in fact offered to drop all charges if the Coptics would move out of Star Island to some place where they were less conspicuous. The Coptics flatly refused. Instead, they hired the best and most expensive lawyers in town. Milton Ferrell, Jr. is their chief defense attorney.

MILTON FERRELL, JR: All right, so it was a civil action; went before the judge. The judge decided that, yes, this was a church under the definition of a church for First Amendment purposes, right?

FERRELL: He decided it was a religion. It was a--

RATHER: It was a religion. And now the question before the Supreme Court is whether it is or isn't.

FERRELL: No, the question before the Supreme Court-- the Supreme Court's not concerned as to the sincerity of the religious belief, or as to whether or not marijuana's essential to the conduct of the religion, nor whether the religion is a religion under the First Amendment of the United States Constitution. Those findings can't be challenged in the Supreme Court. Those have been found as a fact already. There's no controversy about that at all. The controversy in the supreme court of Florida is this: whether the State has a compelling state interest sufficient to override the fundamental interest of any citizen of the United States to practice their religion without governmental interference in it.

RATHER: The implications of such a confrontation, says Florida Assistant State Attorney Henry Adorno, extend far beyond the Coptic Church.

HENRY ADORNO: If a court were to rule that the Coptics do have a First Amendment right, then I think that would be the opening of the floodgates for possible legalization of marijuana in Florida. I, as a prosecutor, would then have to go around and decide who to arrest for possession of marijuana. They obviously would then come up with the defense, "Well, I'm a Coptic," or "I have, you know, I believe that marijuana is my sacrament," which would then muddle the criminal system to no end in trying to defend or trying to prosecute a case where the defense is First Amendment grounds.

RATHER: Meanwhile, quite aware of all the legal problems they have caused, the Coptics continue their activities at Star Island. While the constitutional issue is debated, a federal civil rights ruling allows them to go on smoking marijuana unmolested. One court battle, the right to be considered a church, has already been won. But just what sort of church is it?

The Coptics claim that their mother church is on the Caribbean island of Jamaica. Brother Louv and his American brethren first came to Jamaica in the early seventies. They were all graduates of Haight-Ashbury and the campuses of the sixties, a remnant of a lost generation. They came looking for marijuana, and they found it and bought it in the slums of Kingston from this Jamaican, Keith Gordon. At the same time, Gordon introduced them to an obscure Christian sect. This was the Ethiopian Zion Coptic Church, which claimed for years that the blacks of African were the original Jews of the Bible, and that the slaves of the New World were their direct descendants. Marijuana, or ganja, was the "holy herb". Ripe for a new spiritual experience, these Americans could have found nothing better than a religion that extolled the poor, the black man and marijuana all in one tidy package.

Coptic Heights lies 30 miles outside Kingston. The Coptic Church owns as far as the eye can see. They have roads. They have trucks, lots of trucks. They have a dozen corporations trading under different names. To the average Jamaican, these Coptics are efficient, prosperous and highly suspect.

DAWN RITCH: What they're doing is, on an organized basis, exporting marijuana to Miami.

RATHER: Jamaican journalist Dawn Ritch.

RITCH: The group in Miami at Star Island, they are the backers. They're the people with the money. They control this thing that they would like to pretend is a church. It is no church. That is a factory for the export of ganja.

RATHER: Law enforcement agencies say that with his new-found American friends, Keith Gordon's marijuana business took off like a turpented cat. From being a small-time pusher, he quickly grew to head an organization that controlled cultivation and large-scale distribution right into the United States. Today, the majority of marijuana grown illegally in fields such as this throughout Jamaica has already been pre-sold to Brother Keith and the Coptics. It's prime marijuana that's much in demand.

RITCH: Columbia marijuana, Mexican marijuana, is between two and four percent THC. Our marijuana is between four and eight percent. So we are genuinely the source. Also closest. But Coptic has, I am told, 7,000 acres of farm in Colombia, as well. We are now a branch, you see. They claim, in— in Florida, that we are the source, we are the home of this church. We are simply a branch of a multinational corporation operating on the wrong side of the law.

BROTHER LOUV: When— when you talk about smuggling, what do you mean by smuggling?

RATHER: It is not a fact that you are in the business, the business, of smuggling marijuana into the United States?

BROTHER LOUV: I have no knowledge of even what you're thinking about, much less what you're talking about.

RATHER: The United States Coast Guard here in Florida long has been interested in activities of the Zion Coptic Church, as have the FBI, the Federal Drug Enforcement Administration, the Florida Department of Criminal Law Enforcement, and even the Miami Beach police.

One of the Miami Beach police who, as an undercover agent, recently spent a lot of time investigating the Coptic Church is Sergeant Rick Baretto.

Tell me, if you can and if you will, what I am dealing with when I'm dealing with Brother Louv and Star Island. What is this about?

SERGEANT RICK BARETTO: I don't know. I really don't.

RATHER: You looked into it for two years and you don't know what it's about?

SERGEANT BARETTO: That's correct. They obviously have had— been in a financial situation where they can afford a lot of very high-priced attorneys. So they've been able to successfully tie us up time and time again and— through litigation.

RATHER: That's the way the system works, isn't it?

SERGEANT BARETTO: The wheels turn slowly, yes, sir.

FEMALE PATROL BOAT PILOT: This is Coast Guard 459, Coast Guard 459, over.

RATHER: On at least two occasions in this state alone, members of the church have been arrested in very large drug busts. November, 1977, Marion County, Florida: 13 tons of marijuana found hidden in a tunnel on a farm owned by the church. February, 1978, Citrus County, Florida: 20 tons of marijuana taken off the vessel Our Seas, owned by the church; 16 persons arrested, including Brother Louv's fellow church leader, Keith Gordon of Jamaica. However, none of the charges stuck. May 14th, 1979: Marion County charges dropped. May 22nd, 1979: Citrus County charges dropped. Lack of solid evidence cited as the reasons; that the state had found church members around marijuana, but was unable to establish a direct link between the members and the confiscated dope. So, the fact remains - and this is important - that not a single member of the Zion Coptic Church ever has been convicted of possessing so much as a single ounce of marijuana in any court in the state of Florida.

Is this whole church, based so conveniently in Miami and Jamaica, just a cover for large-scale organized crime? Well, no, it's certainly not as simple as that. All the law enforcement agencies who have investigated the Coptics agree: they cannot be faulted on the sincerity of their religious views. Moreover, the Coptics have never, never been linked in any way with the smuggling of hard drugs, cocaine and heroin, that right now is so rampant throughout Florida. Nor with other activities associated with so-called mafioso crime, such as prostitution, gambling and gun-running. None of these would be consistent with the Coptics' professed beliefs. Marijuana, and only marijuana, is what the Coptics are about. To them it is a holy mission.

(Coptics singing in religious ceremony)

RATHER: Back in Miami, the Coptics are pursuing that mission with all the zeal of a political candidate running for office. They recently hired a production company to film their every move, and they study their screen performances with great care. They advertise themselves, together with a biblical plug for marijuana, in the Miami telephone book Yellow Pages. And they publish an expensive newspaper which details with relish their latest costly legal battles. Where does Brother Louv say he gets the money to do all this?

BROTHER LOUV: I want you to consider that you're talking to a spiritual person who has solved the physical problems, and we should be talking about the matters that could uplift everyone who's hearing us right now.

RATHER: Well, where will the money for this thing come from?

BROTHER LOUV: Do you read in the Scripture money is the tool of the Devil. The love of money is the root of all evil. We love the blessing. Within blessing we've found a higher way of thinking than dollars and cents. Money is a tool. A worldly tool.

RATHER: How do you feel about the Internal Revenue Service case, which is several (indistinct cross-talk)—

BROTHER LOUV: They're a bunch of robbers and thieves and whores!

RATHER: The Internal Revenue Service?

BROTHER LOUV: Robbers, thieves and whores.

RATHER: On what evidence do you (indistinct cross-talk)?

BROTHER LOUV: They have no integrity. They have no foundation. They all have little soft, pink, fleshy little hands. They sit in offices all day long trying to rob the people.

RATHER: Brother Louv's brotherly love clearly wears a little thin when reminded of the Internal Revenue Service. Recently, estimating the value of automobiles, property, boats and the amount of marijuana seized so far, the IRS and the U.S. Customs presented the Coptics with a bill for back taxes and penalties totalling \$18-million. Privately, law enforcement officers hope that the tax man may succeed where the police have so far failed, and bring down the Coptic Church. The Coptics have simply refused to pay, and to them it's just one court case among many.

Their minds, and a great of their money, are right now tied up in a legal battle of greater significance which they are determined to win, if necessary by going all the way to the United States Supreme Court.

If you were to become Brother Louv's defense attorney, an unlikely prospect, I think you'll agree—

ADORNO: I agree.

RATHER: —and you were advising him, where is the greatest danger to him legally?

ADORNO: Legally it's in the decisions that are— in the mood of the— of the country. I don't think this country is ready for the legalization of marijuana, or at least the state of Florida is not ready for that. And I think that for him to win his battle, he's going to have to fight the greater battle, which is not— not only allowing Coptics to smoke marijuana, but take the one step further and having marijuana legalized. I think that's the only way that he's ultimately going to win his battle.

BROTHER LOUV: Not— from the time you say legalized, that to me sounds like whisky, and whisky's something you can buy from the government but if you make your own they'll put you in jail. So that does not apply to marijuana. Marijuana, ganja, is free. We're not fighting for the freedom or the legalization. We're declaring that it is and always has been free.