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THE JESUS MOVEMENT

"It doesn't bother me that it might be a fad, for if it is a fad I welcome it as a fad. At least it is a positive fad, and I'm for anything that promotes the Gospel of Jesus Christ." That is what Billy Graham said concerning the Jesus Movement.

Bishop Fulton Sheen is concerned about the movement's "unorganized, often anti-church emotionalism".

Arthur Blessit, the modern Californian evangelist of Sunset Strip, who has recently made a journey across Europe carrying a cross over his shoulder, and is currently in England making pilgrimages from various cathedrals, sees youth turned on by Jesus "... because they've found the real Jesus of the Bible, not the watered-down Jesus of storyland and all too many churches."

My research overseas into the relationship of the Jesus Movement to the church as a whole indicated that the question was both complex and encouraging.

Dr. Richard Lovelace, Associate Professor of Church History at the Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary in South Hamilton, Massachusetts, with whom I spoke for over an hour, has made this comment: "Honesty is confronting pharisaism; spiritual ecstasy is facing mere notional orthodoxy; naturalness is replacing conventional formalism - and everybody is loosening up. The older generation is nervously sitting down to listen to rock music, previously taboo because of its quintessential worldliness, but now almost necessary because of its Christian uses among young people, many of whom are spontaneous composer-performers. A profusion of hair and strange clothing has to be tolerated among the young because it is eventually strategic in mission; but among the young themselves it is more than a stratagem; it is sanctified self-expression; it is doing their thing; it is a badge of freedom from the deadly conformity that formerly meant righteousness."

It is not quite accurate to use the word 'movement' as a general term to describe the Jesus People because its origins are obscure and its membership has sprung up spontaneously in many parts of the world without any attempted ordered co-ordination. These new Christians are known variously as Jesus Freaks (the word 'freak' doesn't jar upon those of the counter-culture), or Street Christians, derived from the fact that many of those in the new movement were formerly on drugs or had adopted a life-

style of drop-outs from so-called straight society.

But not all the new converts of the Jesus People have used drugs or rejected straight society.

A number of questions immediately arise:

IS IT ANTI-ESTABLISHMENT?

The answer is "Yes, and no". So many areas of our society have been alienated by the ugly face of capitalism, of which we are all aware. The Jesus Movement is the Christian part of the drop-out movement which could be traced back to people like David Wilkerson. This movement has spread like wild-fire over North America, claiming 300,000 adherents. David Wilkerson, the author of "The Cross and the Switchblade", has said: "The new Jesus People feel like pioneers looking for a way to say what they feel. Along with other youth they still repudiate elements in the established system that stimulate greed and hatred. They align themselves with the poverty-stricken peoples around the world. They are down on both imperialists and communists, calling them distorters of man's true potential."

We should frankly admit that there is so much in the establishment which needs to be corrected; the Watergate affair in the United States, the Lambton case in Great Britain and the grasping materialism in our own Australian society. One commentator in the United States asked why the students were not conducting protest marches against the Watergate scandals. The students replied, "The major parties have always been involved in this kind of activity - there's no use protesting any more." Cynicism like this against the establishment has led some young people not to despair but to seek spiritual realities. And they have found their way into the Jesus Movement.

Another question which comes to mind is this:

IS IT ANTI-INTELLECTUAL?

Again the answer is "Yes, and no". Anti-intellectualism has always been characteristic of certain types of young Christians for a long time, so that such an attitude may not have come out of the Jesus Movement as such. In fact, St. Paul, a great intellectual of his day, who was superior to most around him, clearly points out the difference in his letter to the Corinthian Christians, between the wisdom of the world and the wisdom of God. He said: "My speech and my preaching was not with enticing

words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God." (I Cor. 2:4,5).

Becoming a Christian is definitely by faith alone; being a Christian requires an understanding of the Word of God and the full use of one's mind. Some in the movement fully realise this and are making a diligent study of the Word of God in their communes, even spending time learning Greek and Hebrew to understand the original language of the Scriptures better, and become better equipped in their witness.

The Gordon Conwell Theological College has amongst its students, as indeed have a number of other colleges in the United States, a fair proportion of Jesus People who have come to study theology, realising that the simplistic answers to complicated problems are insufficient and unconvincing. Dr. Lovelace has said, "They are not interested in propagating a faith which is as two-dimensional as a comic strip. They are prepared neither to bury their heads in the Bible and dismiss secular learning as 'the wisdom of this world', nor to plant both feet on the shifting presuppositions of secular disciples and reduce or adapt the Christian Faith to what the non-believer can accept. But the danger is that the anti-intellectuals in the movement might well become the leaders and cause confusion to new converts."

But there is another relevant question:

IS IT ANTI-CHURCH?

Again the answer is "Yes, and no". One must realise that the Jesus Movement is the activity of the Holy Spirit across the board amongst young people. Some have come into the movement without any church background at all. They have participated in the counter-culture in protest movements, and have become sadly disillusioned. They have turned from drug abuse, sexual licence and the occult, and they have turned on to Jesus. They have turned away from the Eastern religious mysticism which has sanctified their erotic and psychedelic adventures, and turned towards Jesus Christ who has saved them - but not in a church context. Can they be blamed, then, for thinking that the church is against them and unsympathetic to their experience? Of course they fail to distinguish between the so-called church as no more than a human organisation, and the true church, as the Body of believers. This true church is to be found within any congregation, and one would hope that it was identical with the whole

congregation, but so often that is not the case. These people may come into some of our churches and from their point of view (and in some cases they may be right) hardly find a genuinely converted Christian.

I talked with Canon Michael Green, Principal at Nottingham Theological College, who said that he had not found the Jesus People arrogant towards other Christians, but, he said, "They wanted to know if I was real, and when they discovered that they thought I was, they were prepared to gather round and say, 'Will you teach us?', although I was twice their age." I asked, "Do you think that the church itself is ready to come together with these Jesus People?" He replied, "No, I don't think so. The church as a whole is an extremely conservative Body. But the complacency of the church will be shattered."

While some have been converted from a non-church background as the drop-outs in society, others have been rededicated from a church background as dropouts from the church. Christian parents have failed to show consistent Christianity in their examples to their children. Whether these elements remain anti-church depends so much upon the willingness of church people to welcome this new life. But that will not be easy.

Before I went overseas we had a very inspiring service here in this church. It was Haydn's music to "The Seven Last Words" of Christ from the Cross. Between each of these musical segments a short meditation was given on one of those seven sentences. They emphasised the reasons for Christ's death and how men could be reconciled to Him. I remember quite well that there was a young man whom I hadn't seen before, who remarked as I shook hands with people coming out of the church, "What sort of a service was that? There was no mention of Jesus". I was staggered, because I thought that it was all about Jesus. Now whether he was right or wrong in his assessment, obviously he didn't find here at that time what he was looking for.

Mayo Mohs, the religious editor of "Time" Magazine, stated recently that there is a renewed interest in Jesus Christ among the young. He claims that the Jesus Movement has more lasting power than it was given credit for when it first became familiar on the national scene. Young people, tied up in Satanism, which has led to some crimes, are beginning to look elsewhere. There is a youthful infatuation with the rites and the symbols of magic, coming, as he said, at an ironic time when the church is

getting rid of incense and Latin. He reported, "The kids are using Latin now in an inverse order, in Satan worship." One of the Satanic prayers is "Ave Satanus, Rege Satanus". There are other dangers in Soka Gakkai, the Japanese youth movement, claiming 18 million adherents, and the Hare Krishna, which are being pressed upon people in streets throughout the world. These are frightening alternatives to Christianity. Because of disillusionment amongst young people today, these movements are gathering their devotees with alarming success.

There are other groups which appear to be Christian, and sometimes claim to be part of the Jesus Movement, who have within them dangerous elements. I mention one: The Children of God. They are anti-establishment, anti-intellectual, anti-church, and in addition, anti-family. There are four types of young people particularly susceptible to this particular group. Firstly, those who have tried all the 'trips' and have become dissatisfied; Secondly, those with a fundamentalist background who have not sufficient biblical knowledge to feel confident of their position, and often they feel guilty about not being 'sold out completely for Christ'; Thirdly, those who strongly need a sense of belonging. Their families and their churches have not provided the security they crave; Fourthly, those who come from excessively permissive backgrounds and feel a need for discipline. The Children of God cater for the all-or-nothing mentality which prevails among some young people of our generation. Some in the movement may be genuine converts to Christianity, but there is the danger of easy manipulation.

My wife and I visited a young people's meeting in Oslo, Norway. Permission had first to be obtained from the leaders of the meeting so that older people could attend. Eventually that permission was given, and we found our way around the back streets of the city to a rather large two-storey house. We knocked at the door, and the leader let us in with the request that we might do as all others had done and take off our shoes. We crept up the stairs to a large room which was crowded with about 150 young people. And here we came in an atmosphere of joyful singing, of the clapping of hands to the singing, people raising their hands in the air, which meant various things to them. There was a time of testimony, and there was a time of disturbance as one person seemed to be upset and creating a great deal of trouble. But he was dealt with very kindly by those present. Then as they clasped hands and sang with arms interlocked, they then began to pray. I could recognize the 'Amen's' and the 'hallelujahs', but

apart from that the Norwegian language didn't convey a great deal to me, except that there was a genuineness there, a recognizable reality amongst those young people. After the meeting we gathered a few together and asked some questions from those who could speak English.

"How did you come together?" They replied that "the Children of God were here, and caused great concern. Young people had been taken from their families. Eventually, the leaders of this organisation left the country. Some of us didn't quite know where to go from here, and so we got in touch with our church (the established Lutheran church), and they allowed us to have a place like this, and a certain autonomy in which we could work and witness, and so we have these meetings during the week. But we go to our churches on Sundays. We have big meetings for young people. We had one last Saturday night at the cathedral, and 1,500 people were present." And the same young people, with their enthusiastic singing, were the next night outside the famous Cathedral in Oslo, after a meeting at which Brother Andrew of the Underground Church, had spoken.

These young people with their fervent witness, were integrated into the total life of the church. They valued what the church could do for them, and the church certainly valued the vitality of their witness.

The Jesus Movement has spread into various countries of the world. In Great Britain, for the most part, the Jesus People are working within the churches. It does not seem particularly significant amongst students, but it has a strong sense of moral responsibility, so that many became actively involved in the effective witness of the Festival of Light. They called it the Festival of Jesus.

One significant characteristic of the Jesus Movement in many places is the charismatic emphasis. Enroth, Ericson and Peters have together produced a factual survey of the Jesus Movement entitled, "The Story of the Jesus People." It was commended by "Christianity Today" as "the best, comprehensive description and assessment of the variegated Jesus Movement." In it this comment is made: "It is significant that these experience-oriented members of the counter-culture (referring to those previously engaged in Eastern mysticism on the one hand and transcendental experience on the other) found meaning not only in conversion and the dramatic transformation that it entails, but also in those practices of primitive Christianity that have been all but

forgotten by the historic Christian churches - healing, tongues and other gifts of the Holy Spirit. In addition to meeting the very real and deeply felt spiritual needs, the charismatic gifts experienced by many Jesus People may be thought of as ways to resolve more general inner conflicts".

I don't want at this stage to discuss the charismatic movement, but simply to indicate that it is significant in the Jesus Movement. Michael Green said, "There is an emphasis upon the charismatic gifts of the Holy Spirit, but unlike some other Pentecostals, they don't go to town about it. They're not always talking about prophecies and tongues and healings, but it is part of their world view, and they use it."

While personally I thank God for the new life, the warmth of fellowship and the complete dedication of many who claim special charismatic gifts, it must never be seen as a short cut through doctrinal difficulties or ecclesiastical disciplines. The real contribution to spiritual advancement will come in fellowship with other Christian believers in an attitude of humility and love. Then those who claim these gifts, and those who have not had such experiences, will consider the other better than himself.

But there is another question:

WILL IT LAST?

Some suggest that there are enough weaknesses to make it insufficient in itself to qualify as a major renewal of the church. Others suggest that it is the work of the Holy Spirit and that no ordered pattern should be expected, but that the Spirit blows where He wills. Whether the movement, if it is to be rightly called a movement, will last as such, is not important. So many movements in the past have begun as movements, and have continued as ineffective movements long beyond the time when the Spirit of God was able to use them fully. The crucial point is that men and women, young and old, are being brought face to face with Jesus Christ in a direct encounter. Lives are being changed. The miracle of conversion is taking place within the lives of the most unlikely people, and its reality is being shown in a new attitude of love towards others.

The religious editor of "Time" recognised this fact in others, although he couldn't claim it for himself. His two elderly aunts who had been transformed by the power of Jesus, are now going around knocking on doors witnessing for Jesus Christ,

talking to people about their new experience of Him. All the things which had moulded their lives in the past had suddenly been changed and they became new people. He went on to say, "There is a very good recommendation from the Jesus People, and that is that there is a Gospel, and the Gospel has a real validity in today's world, and that validity has something to do with the way we live and the way we treat our fellow men. There is no faith and there is no church without Jesus Christ, and that's what the kids have found, and that's what they like to hear. In all the projects we undertake that message should remain at the core."

Actually, of course, the Jesus Movement began about 2,000 years ago when Jesus Christ invited all to follow Him. Those who have taken up the challenge have become part of a worldwide movement with a lasting influence far beyond their numerical strength.

So we are led to the final question:

WHAT ABOUT YOU AND ME?

It is very easy to sit down and listen to a discourse about the Jesus Movement in a kind of academic way, but each one could be involved in it, because it is not only for those who have come off drugs,

or who want some victory over sexual aberrations,
or who are bored with luxury living,
or who have some deep personal problem,
or who are looking for something sensational;

it is for all who will come to Jesus Christ and recognise Him for what He is, the Son of God

who came amongst us men,
who took upon Himself dirty humanity,
who identified Himself with our problems,
who died upon the Cross that our sins might be taken away,
who rose again from the dead completely victorious over

Satan, over sin and over the grave, and

who offers to all who will simply and humbly put their trust in Him the way of victory in this life and the way into everlasting life.

There is a Jesus revolution every time an individual person puts his faith in Jesus Christ;

there is an identity with the Jesus People whenever a person becomes a believer in Christ;

and there is a Jesus Movement whenever a person allows the Holy Spirit to use him to glorify Christ by bringing others to

Jesus.

I wonder, are we prepared to allow the Holy Spirit to move in our being, that we might be witnesses for Him with great joy and expectancy? The command comes through loud and clear to all who claim the status of Christian: "You" - yes, "You shall be witnesses unto Me in Jerusalem, Judaea, in Samaria, and to the uttermost parts of the earth."

A PRAYER

Quietly, O God, we would wait upon you, believing that Your Presence with us has stimulated us to new devotion, to fresh faith, and to dedicated service. Enable us, O God, to do Your Will; for Christ's sake. Amen.

THE JESUS MOVEMENT

What are we to make of this virile spiritual revolution - is it from God or from men? Lance Shilton had many illuminating encounters with 'Jesus People' on his world trip, and gives us here some valuable insights and assessments.

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