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The Jesus Movement
(Second in a Series)

Love Is Its Theme; And
Evangelism Its Response

by the Baptist Press

"Wow! Jesus loves you."

Over and over teenagers across the nation are using that phrase as the "Jesus Movement" shakes their lives. To them, it is a startling revelation.

And it captures the theme of the movement. Love is the theme. Jesus is the subject. Surprising discovery is the response.

In Southern California, a mustached youth shook his head and repeated the phrase, "Wow, I used to hate cops, and now I just love everybody. Praise God."

In the worship services for teenagers in the movement, love is the mood. You can feel it, hanging heavy in the atmosphere.

"It's so peaceful there, man," said one teenager in describing a worship and Bible study period at Calvary Chapel in Costa Mesa, about 40 miles south of Los Angeles. "You can go there and sing or listen and know Jesus loves you. The love is just so heavy."

It shows on the faces of the kids present. Look closely at their radiant, happy expressions. Wear your nerve ends on your eyeballs, and sense what you see: the freshness, the vigor, the openness, the commitment in those shining faces.

When did you last see that?

Listen as they greet, not just their friends, but strangers. "Jesus loves you." -- "Jesus is the answer." -- "Praise the Lord." -- "God bless you." -- "Glory to God."

Even when greeted with jeers, the response is love. "Freaks! A bunch of wierdos," yelled a youth with a beer can in his hand as an old Cadillac wheels past three long-haired girls entering Bethel Tabernacle, another Jesus movement center in Redondo Beach near Los Angeles.

One of the girls turns clamly. Her answer is quiet, almost serene and completely without rancor: "Jesus loves you," she says.

As love is its theme, evenagelism is its response. The Jesus movement is intensely evangelistic.

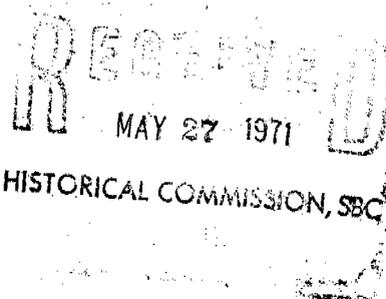
Why? The youth have discovered Jesus, and his love. And they can no more bottle it inside them than they could cap a volcano with a cork. They've got to tell others.

"Hey man," they say, "Jesus died for your sins."

"Yeah, man, get turned on to Jesus. He's the greatest high in the world."

Everywhere they go they bubble over with the news of what Jesus is doing in their lives. They bring friends to church, Bible studies, communes, rock concerts. They pass out tracts on the streets.

It's a social event, sure; but it is more. It is their attempt to lovingly offer friends the peace they've found. It's their effort to share the rapture.



Their witnessing is in the idiom of youth, not the pious phrases of the older generation. Instead of asking, "Brother, are you saved," they often respond with a friendly, "Jesus loves you; can we rap about it?" Their loving, sharing phrase takes evangelism out of the "selling" category and puts it in the "sharing" category. And they are willing to leave the response to the Holy Spirit, without using high pressure evangelism techniques.

So intense is this evangelistic sharing that freelance writer and photographer Jack and Betty Cheetham, who sold their story on the Jesus movement to Look, were converted during their investigation. Instead of just "covering" the Jesus movement, they joined it.

Some of the most intense public expressions of love as a basic characteristic of the Jesus movement are shown at the mass baptisms where hundreds of kids are immersed in the swirling waves of the Pacific.

Calvary Chapel in Costa Mesa, for example, recently baptized 700 in one day. Earlier, they had baptized more than 1,000 young people.

It's a super-charged time, with the youth feeling unique crowd electricity.

"Wow," exclaimed one dripping young girl, "I just love Jesus so much. I've never been so happy in my whole life. Oh, praise Jesus."

Water--or was it tears--streamed down her face, but she was obvious to it. Her friends swallowed her up with open arms and shouts of congratulations, praise and joy.

At a mass baptism at First Baptist Church in Houston following a crusade with more than 4,000 conversions and 1,100 baptisms, the crowd expelled thundering cheers and whistles and applauded loudly as the pastor raises a new convert from the water.

"Praise Jesus," one youth shouted. "He needed that...Praise Jesus!"

The rapture, joy, celebration, love, electrifying sense of the presence of God all are manifestations of the theme of love embracing the movement. These characteristics are seen, not only at the mass baptisms, but in the music of the movement as well.

When the Jesus rock groups play and sing of the love and Jesus, the kids respond with an emotional "high." And music is where it is at. Music communicates. Music is "in." Preaching is "out."

There is in the movement an apparent de-emphasis on preaching. With it goes the strong beat of rock music, and the twang of an amplified guitar. And the feeling, like the technique, is electric.

Testified one thin, long-haired girl in a maroon T-shirt: "Wow, I went to the rock concert Friday night...and wow, it was just wonderful. So beautiful.

"I mean, like the guys were playing and I raised my arms, and I could just feel it. I mean, my arms got so light and I felt I could just reach out to heaven. And it was so goood...."

She was referring to a rock concert sponsored by Calvary Chapel at the Woodrow Wilson High School in Long Beach. As estimated 5,000 kids were there, packing the 1,700 capacity auditorium, Another 1,000 jammed into the gymnasium. Thousands were turned away; hundreds waited outside hoping someone would leave.

Inside, five Christian rock groups, (one of them symbolically called Love Song), play and sing. Their sounds are quality; their musicianship, professional. Both in song and testimony, the tell of their search for meaning oin life, their trips through drugs and sex occult religions to Jesus. About 400 kids respond to the invitation, tears rushing over their cheeks; smiles cutting their faces in half.

A boy sitting on the steps of the stage comments aloud. "Oh, wow, it's so wild. It's so wild. Praise the Lord."

Though perhaps not necessarily a manifestation of the Jesus movement, but certainly complimenting it, "God-rock" music is sweeping the country in popularity.

According to authorities in the music industry, only about one out of every 100 records becomes a hit; but one out of every 25 hits now has a religious them.

The examples are legion: Judy Collins' old-time-religion recording of "Amazing Grace," George Harrison's, "My Sweet Lord," the amazing popularity of "Jesus Christ, Superstar," and top-40 hits like "Put Your Hand in the Hand of the Man from Galilee."

Rock music is part of the youth culture, and it has been a natural thing for the Jesus people to take an idiom of youth culture to express their faith. Yet the movement is strangely inconsistent in its blending of culture and religious expression.

Bare feet, long hair, ragged clothes--the mod look--are blended with a new pietism in the movement that defies understanding by most adults. They look like "hippies;" but they talk like pietistic fundamentalists.

Accompanying the new pietism is a new literalism in biblical interpretation. Yet there is nothing new about it, except that youth educated in a culture that teaches logical criticism accept with such unquestioning, simple faith the Bible, and its application to life.

Coming out of a youth culture where permissiveness has recently sanctioned everything, the pendulum is now swinging the other way.

The movement stresses the Ten Commandments. It strongly prohibits promiscuity, greed, pride, drunkenness, drugs, debauchery, laziness, cigarettes, etc. A new kingdom in moral conduct seems to be waiting in the wings.

It is most apparent in the Christian communes that have sprung up in many major cities. Girls wear long maxi-dresses, sleep upstairs, and never go into the boys' rooms except to clean them.

"We want this place to be an example of the way Christians should live," said the director of Mansion Messiah, a commune in Los Angeles. About 30 single young people live there, mostly just studying the Bible. A feeling of Puritanism hangs in the air. The house has rigid rules and curfews. And they have no "moral" problems.

And the youth seems to have the ability to accept the discipline with a willingness that causes them little distress.

Paradoxically, love is the theme of the movement; yet many of the participants would reject the situation ethics concept that Christians should reject rules in favor of doing whatever is "the loving thing to do" in each and every situation." Instead, they search the Bible for prooftexts for a rule for each action.

Pietism, fundamentalism, and legalism are both strengths and weaknesses in the movement. Most would rejoice that the youth are seemingly turning this direction and rejecting the former state of drugs, sexual permissiveness and atheism.

Others would counter that the movement is simplistic; that it has a shallow grasp of biblical theology; even that it is an emotional escape from the harsh reality of the world. "Turning on with Jesus" has been substituted for "turning on with LSD."

Yet it is not that simple. Generalizations about a phenomenon so diverse are difficult to substantiate.

But if any one trend seems to come through loud and clear in the movement, it is the theme of love. And love runs deep, not shallow, in the heart of the gospel.

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Baptist VIEWpoll
Martin B. Bradley, Director

Is There A "Credibility Gap"
In Local Churches?

baptist press

by Ken Hayes

NASHVILLE (BP)--The majority of a representative panel of Southern Baptist pastors and Sunday School teachers feel that, to some degree, a "credibility gap" does exist in local churches, according to a recent survey conducted by the Baptist VIEWpoll.

Panel members were presented with the following: "Much is heard today about 'credibility gap,' that is, the contradictions between what leaders say they plan to do and what they actually do. In the Southern Baptist Convention today, what would you say regarding a 'credibility gap' in the local churches (between members and leaders)?" Three alternatives were given to the panel--"quite prevalent," "exists, but to no great extent" and "hardly exists."

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More than one-half of the pastors (51.3 per cent) and slightly less than one-half of the teachers (46.4 per cent) feel that a "credibility gap" in local churches "exists, but to no great extent."

About one-fourth (24.8 per cent) of the pastors and one-fifth (20.6 per cent) of the Sunday School teachers feel that the existence of a "credibility gap" in local churches is "quite prevalent."

A "credibility gap" in local churches "hardly exists" according to 20.4 per cent of the pastors and 26.2 per cent of the teachers.

Some pastors (3.5 per cent) and teachers (6.8 per cent) did not respond to the question.

Pastors with a "liberal" orientation toward religion and politics seemed to indicate a greater awareness of a "credibility gap" in the local churches than did others on the panel.

The findings are based on 91 per cent response from the Baptist VIEWpoll panel, composed of approximately 300 pastors and 300 Sunday School teachers selected to represent a cross section of persons holding those leadership positions in the Southern Baptist Convention.

