

Direction

QUAKERS AND THE "HIPPIE CULTURE"

- Richard J. Foster

Today it is "in" to either be a "hippie" or to talk about them--so we thought we would follow the crowd. We want to use the term "hippie" in a somewhat broad sense to refer to those who have a very distinct disenchantment with the establishment and a rather less distinct philosophy of life. This person has a very real, though ambiguous, concern for the meaning of love, a sincere desire to be addressed in personal categories, an almost total disregard for the establishment, and a tragic sell-out to the drug traffic. He is more widely diffused into our society than is usually recognized. There is many a teenager in the church who has not made an outward identification with hippie philosophy, yet agrees with that philosophy.

"Hippies" with whom I have talked and counselled have asked penetrating questions which the church can no longer avoid. They have something to say to our inconsistent rules of piety, our making proper dress a sacred cow, and our silence on pressing social issues. Their often earnest concern to find God through drugs is a sad commentary on the church's stifled ability to share the new life in Christ.

We are considering this topic not only because it is a pressing social issue, but because of the receptiveness of the hippie population to vital Christian faith. In discussions with hippies, I have been impressed with their openness to the message of the Gospel. They are eager to discuss anything that is "real". This does not mean that there is to be an influx of hippies into the churches, far from it, but it does mean that they will respond eagerly to love. Quaker collegians are in an advantageous position to speak to the "Hippie Culture."

In ministering to the hippie, the first thing we must recognize is that we are dealing with a cultural movement. They have their own dress, language, customs, mores, religious beliefs, rituals, and world views. Therefore, our approach is similar to that of any missionary. We find those areas of "Hippie Culture" that are redemptive and transform them

into meaningful Christian categories. In itself, a beard is not evil and we ought to admit it! We must find a point of contact with the "Hippie Culture" without forsaking the Gospel. Admittedly, this is not easy--the mission of the church never has been!

Next, I can only plead that we reject the belief that the separated life means the isolated life. All of us have a tendency to live in our castles. At times, usually when we feel guilty, we charge out like the white knight to wave our lance and clean up the city and then tear back to our castle, all with a minimum of personal involvement. The call of Christ is to expend some shoe leather on the hippie world. Personal encounter is the approach necessary. If the church does this with love and concern, she will have a hearing.

However, to do this kind of thing takes time--lots of time! Yet, the church programs are filled to the hilt now, not to mention our own personal schedule. Hence, we must do some "ecclesiastical mercy killing". Some of our committees or events or meetings will have to go. God has given us only so much time and we had best be good stewards of it! A ministry to hippieland should, I believe, be a top priority. Whether we minister to a specific grouping of hippies, or to students in our local schools who have imbibed hippie thought, is not important--that we do something is important!

Finally, I should say a word about the "Hippie Culture" and worship. As Quakers, we are in a good position here. As we already know, pews, organ music, stained glass windows, etc., are not the essential ingredients in a service of worship. We know that one of their communal homes could be a center of worship. We could capitalize on their interest in meditation if we were able to center the meditation around the Scripture. No doubt, the ministry we could have in the area of worship would be amazing, if we were willing to work out the principles implicit in Quaker worship.

There is much to be done, and Quakers ought to be pioneering in this field. If we accept the challenge, it will cost us--discipleship always does!

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