

Hippies, Yippies and Student Revolt

By Henry Payne, O.P.

Something different is happening in America today and it has been described as student revolt, student unrest or simply as student violence. In any case America is quickly becoming both culturally and numerically a youth society, and it is increasingly impossible to avoid or ignore the challenge posed by the student rebellion. No other society has had so much opportunity and affluence and yet such widespread dissatisfaction. Politically, socially and economically there is a growing rejection of the American system by American youth.

The most popularized example of this new movement is the hippie phenomenon. They call themselves free men or flower people, and they represent a total rejection of present day values and customs. They are mostly young people, and the best example of what the youth revolt means. Culturally they have been taught the values of individual freedom and human personality, and they in turn have used these very values as a radical critique against society. The basic source of their strength is that quite simply the modern American way of life has depersonalized man and robbed him of some of his most cherished freedoms.

Activism is an important aspect of the hippie movement which is characteristic of contemporary youth. The hippies do not just speak of a new way of living but are actually living a new way of life. Likewise, the followers of Senator McCarthy not only demonstrated for a new political structure but actually went out and created a new political

movement. From civil rights involvement to new left radicalism, the whole youth movement is motivated by some sort of activism, of doing something now.

The hippie way of life is a new attempt at freedom and natural living. If the hippie rejects much of the current American system, he has his own values and non-system for living. The whole movement is totally romantic in that it dreams of a world without power structures and implicitly believes in the perfection of man. It is essentially a religion and a search for religion. The reason for rejecting contemporary society is that it happens to be based on a phoney system of valuation where anyone who follows certain rules is automatically given a certain status and the privileged use of other people. Today's youth is extremely critical of this sort of injustice and hypocrisy where some people are selectively given more than others simply because they play the social game.

The crucial question, however, is whether the hippie culture has produced a more human way of living and indeed whether it can preserve the very values in the name of which it is rebelling. The answer is complex and not at all obvious. It is certainly just to reject the materialistic power structure of the modern business world, but still one cannot replace the social benefits coming from a stable economic system by flowers and drugs. The very real human needs of food, clothing, housing etc. can hardly be provided for in the primitive state of living demanded by the early hippie spokesmen.

The hippie revolt against the demands and restraints of technological society is a romantic leap into primitivism and mysticism. Hippies have experimented in radical new forms of living and their most creative contribution seems to be in developing communes where group support and activity make it possible for others to live. These communes are most successful where some sort of creative objective unites and supports the community. Usually this activity can be some type of creative work such as art, newspapers, drama or writing. There is an evolving social philosophy which is still being formulated as the hippie community tries to locate itself within the larger community. Most hippies are highly sensitive individuals and can be of great value to society especially in terms of personalizing social structures. In many ways it is most important that a society be capable of accepting and not repressing a hippie community.

Unfortunately the relations between the free community and society are usually very tense. The person who is likely to join a hippie community probably has many unresolved psychological problems

especially in regard to authority and social acceptance. Moreover, the free community is without overt authority control and usually fosters radical behavior; all this is not conducive to eliminating psychological problems which tend to express themselves in anti-social behavior. Consequently there is likely to be suspicious if not violent relations with the local police authorities.

Nevertheless, the internal motivation for most of those living as hippies is basically religious. Their original revolt against society is based on a recognition of value and betrayal of value by modern society. This religious impulse is fostered by an open mysticism usually based on drugs or sex, but often highly spiritual and contemplative in form. Identification with Indian rituals or the use of Zen and other forms of Oriental religion is common. The primary religious experience is the consciousness induced by the use of drugs. The Neo-American Church is the major advocate of the drug cult and it functions explicitly as a religion. Still there is a difference among hippies on the role of drugs. Some see drugs only as means for expanding the mind and its ultimate purpose to turn one on to life and not simply to turn on. The Native American Church is somewhat representative of this viewpoint. However difficult it might be to isolate a hippie philosophy in this regard, drugs and sex seem to be necessary means to the search for radical freedom and free being.

The hippie apparently is willing to accept any form of traditional worship or ritual if it is colorful and highly symbolic. One of the most beautiful aspects of the hippie culture is the stress on natural mysticism and contemplation. This is a much needed counterbalance to the over intellectualized and rationalized existence of twentieth century man. The esoteric and superstitious forms such as astrology, divination, omens, etc. are highly praised and often superficially stressed. The common stereotype of beads and flowers is part of this experience. There is little doubt, however, that modern man needs this corrective to the over-rational demands of modern society. Modern philosophical studies of phenomenology and comparative religions have stressed similar developments. Rational existence which is separated from the affective and intuitional needs of man are highly destructive of personal being.

Here again, however, the important question is how effective is the pursuit of oriental or non-Western forms of ritual in satisfying this basic religious need. The renewal of the Christian liturgy is a parallel attempt to find new forms of worship which will be more meaningful to modern man. Perhaps the hippie experience should be seen as the

search for new forms of sense experience and the creation of new modes of worship. Unfortunately, the hippie search has remained for the most part outside of and external to society.

Yippies and Activism

The creation of a new way of life has raised a sort of dilemma for the hippie movement. Some hippies find it necessary to convince others of their way of living, while many are happy to exist without changing the society around them. Consequently, there is a certain tension between the philosophy of contemplation and non-activism and the need to change society so that the hippie can exist within it. There is, moreover, a strong activist element within the hip community and these people have since become known as Yippies. Unlike the original love people who sought peace and non-violence, these new protestants of the American way of living are committed to political even revolutionary change and may not hesitate to use violence and power.

Indeed, it might very well be that there is no more hippie movement in the original sense of a people seeking love and peace; the hostility of the society and the failure of the early movement have destroyed that vision. The Yippies are a large number of deeply involved youth who identify with the radical style of hippie life, but are also radically concerned with changing the structure of society. Today's free community may include all sorts of non-activists along with the most radical revolutionaries.

It is hard to judge the real meaning of the Yippies for in many ways they are simply a construct of the mass media. Jerry Rubin and others who created the Youth International Party or the Yippies, are admitted disciples of Marshall McLuhan. Using the techniques of communication and media control they created almost from nothing a new reality, the Yippies. There is more to it than just that however, and whatever can be said for the medium is the message theme, there were a lot of American youth who identified with the Yippie "thing." The identification was strong enough to bring thousands to Chicago and the Democratic Convention. A whole world of draft resisters and new left activists found an identification they didn't have with the hippie movement.

The overt aim of much of the Yippie activity is the inciting of revolt and revolution within society. The frightened and repressive action of the forces of society have simply solicited more support for the

resistance and other forces working against the American system. The fiasco of the Chicago police brutality is an example of this kind of over reaction. This kind of repression can only lead to more violence and anti-social activity as more and more young people grow up with the experience of deep alienation and rejection by the political system.

Here again it is a source of injustice within the American system, in this case the unconditional draft laws, which are the radical source of the validity of the Yippie protest. There are resistance groups in almost every city and full time workers in the larger cities. Moreover, a significant number of university and religious leaders are supporting this movement so that there is always some sort of effective aid available. It takes little convincing in the face of such draft laws to extend the logic of civil disobedience even further and to include many other rules and regulation imposed by the government. This is especially true of the court system. Many young people have experienced great frustration at a court system which can only follow existing guide lines in enforcing laws violated in the name of civil disobedience. Indeed, being in jail or having been to jail is becoming a sort of status symbol. Spiritual leaders like Martin Luther King and Fr. Daniel Barrigan are extraordinary examples of this sort of thing.

The primary purpose of the Yippie movement was to discredit and disrupt the American political process especially in the 1968 presidential election. It called for massive protests in Chicago and elsewhere to ridicule the political system. For Yippie leaders it is impossible to work within the system; to attempt to do so is to prostitute oneself and to become a part of the system. This is perhaps an overly harsh judgment, but the experience of many McCarthy and other youth groups to change the system from within and their disillusionment seems to have confirmed the original judgment.

The proclamation of a revolution is the essence of Yippie philosophy, and the only difficulty is how to effect this revolution. The forces of society for controlling violent dissent are just too great for any violent revolution. Nevertheless, the large amount of publicity given to the Yippie phenomena and the over reaction of society against them has occasioned a certain sympathy for the Yippie cause. Many young people have come to think in terms of the necessity of revolution and not just change in the American way of life. There is just too much injustice in the distribution of wealth and the power of the government authority and other structures which control their lives. Moreover, the United States is already involved in a sort of revolution in the relations between black and white America. The Yippie cause is all too readily

identified with the black man's struggle for his rights. The coalition of black power and new left movements actually took place with the formation of the Peace and Freedom Party. So while a violent revolution seems impossible, it is uncertain exactly how successful society would be in preventing or controlling such a revolt.

It is uncertain what effect the Yippie cause will have upon society. It has received much publicity and represents a much needed critique of many social structures. The difficulties arise when solutions to these problems are sought in violent rather than non-violent means. Also what the Yippie movement becomes will depend on how society reacts to its challenge. The use of force as in Chicago can only stimulate and increase the totalists' type of revolt demanded by the Yippie leaders. Perhaps the only solution is for those in authority to begin accepting the role of young people in shaping and determining the course of authority.

Student Revolt

The recent student riots at Berkeley and Columbia and in other parts of the world is an historical phenomenon occasioned by the general affluence and the communications revolution taking place today. Today's college student has been taught to value his personal being and to question the values of his society. Modern society has so relieved man of the immediacy of the struggle for human needs (at least in most of the Western world) that certain ethical and moral perspectives take on much deeper significance. The parents of today's youth were so taken up by economic and social needs that they were never really given an opportunity to question the values they were striving for. Today's youth is different, he spends much of his time wondering what he will be and do. There is a great variety in what he can do and he is constantly making value judgments on these realities. Moreover, he has been taught to react more sensitively to his own personal needs and he is deeply sensitive to hypocrisy and injustice.

The crucial problem with student revolt is that today's student is impatient with the change which is effected through authority. Most students suffer a radical alienation from their teachers not only on the level of authority but also in regard to what is being taught in the schools. The subject matter of most courses, however meaningful and relevant in itself, is just not communicating to the student. Consequently he feels frustrated and violent toward the school system. Unfortunately, the American educational system is not doing much to

remedy this situation. Students have resorted to free schools and demonstrations for academic freedom in treating relevant subjects. The students at larger universities are extremely unhappy with the impersonal and closed system of courses. They have revolted and demanded more control over university policies, and this process of violent demonstration will probably continue until the university system is radically changed.

Another crucial development is that the universities are no longer uncritical of the government and the way politics is controlling the life of the country. An increasing number of professors and faculty are encouraging dissent to public authority; and an activist youth is a perfect audience for their ideas. From simply demanding more control over university affairs, it is an easy step to demand more control over political authority; especially in such matters as the draft which seriously affect their lives. In any case, students are being educated by what is happening around them to some sort of activism, even the violent taking over of university facilities and rioting.

Christian Response

The Christian in the modern world is challenged by the youth movement to live up to his ideals and values. Indeed, it is difficult to stress enough the value of a vital Christian ethics for the needs expressed by today's young people. Unfortunately the ecclesial structure and organization is just as objectional to a young person as is governmental authority. The unhappy result is that this further alienation from religion has forced young people into the mysticism of drugs, sex or activism to satisfy the basic need for a religious dimension to life. Indeed, the problems of social justice and dissent are easy substitutes for liturgy and religious community.

A more difficult problem facing the Christian is how to respond to the new morality and new way of living proposed by the youth revolution. Since the Church is identified with authority structures, it is especially difficult to communicate the perennial values of the Christian way of life. Many Church leaders are actively involved with guiding young people, but many more are satisfied with non-involvement and detached criticism.

In general the Christian has to be ambivalent toward any historical movement for his very belief is a radical critique of every historical movement. The essential mystery of Christianity is supernatural and can never be reduced to some solution in history or time. Thus the Christian must question the finality of the Hippies or Yippies or

student rebels; still there is an analogy in the revolution or metanoia demanded by Christian faith and the revolution proclaimed by young people. In fact the Christian should be as much a revolutionary within society as the hippie or student rebel.

The Christian should be most appreciative of the ethics of freedom, for he is radically free in Christ and beyond the law. The power of Christ and not the power of any social or political structure is the measure of the Christian vocation. It is especially in the use of his freedom that the Christian has so much to communicate to the modern world. Beyond the changes in way of life or society, it is only by an integral ordering of the human soul that man becomes truly free.

In the present state of conflict between youth and authority there is an immediate need for communication. And there is perhaps a special demand on the Christian to exercise his charity so that by loving others first the possibility of communication among others might be opened up. Also the Christian ethics of non-violence and love has many things to say to modern man and it is up to individual Christians to communicate this vision to other men.

THE DEER

Sensitive brown eyes,
cautious behind trees,
thin and swift, with legs which leapt with fears
responsive to love
yet careful
because tender.

VINCENT WISEMAN, O.P.