

# The Alternative Society-V

## It's Hip To Be Holy

EDITOR'S NOTE: The Alternative Society is getting religion. The religious beliefs are crazy-quilt, to be sure, but the fervor is widespread in this other America, as disclosed in this dispatch; the last in a series from the AP Special Assignment Team.

By KEN HARTNETT

TAOS, N.M. (AP)—Dennis rolled up the sleeve of his blue work shirt and showed the track marks. They stood out on his right arm like stigmata.

"I was a drug addict, a smacker; then Jesus came in."

"Praise the lord," sang out Corky.

"Praise the lord," sang out Jill.

"A 30 second heroin cure and with no cold turkey; It just takes that long with Jesus. Praise the Lord," Dennis said.

The three longhaired evangelists sat on mattresses on the stone floor of their farmhouse outside Taos. Rabbit stew simmered on the wood stove and fresh baked honey bread cooled by the back window. Corky fondled his guitar. He had just accompanied himself as he sang, "Jesus is Right On, Brother."

It was a hippie dream come true—peace serenity in the country, surrounded by friends and no rent to pay ("We can stay as long as we don't grow grass and we keep the gate closed so the stock don't stray," Dennis explained).

Besides, Jill, Dennis and Corky as well as Ty and Tall Tom and Carol, who were bringing the word to California, didn't need grass to get high. They were high on Jesus.

The Alternative Society, where substantial numbers of young Americans are struggling to build a way of life apart from what they see as decadent and doomed America, is getting religion.

Hindu ashrams, Jesus houses, spiritualist newspapers are becoming as much a part of the Alternative Society scene as the free clinics, the communes, the free universities and other experimental structures of the budding counter culture.

From Cambridge to Berkeley, it's hip to be holy.

Traveling through the Alternative Society—that other America with its own wobbly institutions, its own peculiar language, its own special sense of what's right and wrong—one encounters a crazy-quilt of religious belief.

"This generation is just overflowing with Jesus freaks," said Curly, his straw hat pushed back on his head and his white teeth locked in an enduring smile.

"For sure," said his sidekick, Dennis, the ex-heroin addict. "I've been reborn. I'm a seven-month-old baby."

"God has saved us all," agreed Shelley, a 19-year-old girl who lives in Seattle's House of Easter. "Before I discovered God, I was a dope addict and a witch." Now she devotes up to 14 hours a day furthering the cause of her Jesus commune, including five hours of personal witnessing and four hours of Bible training.

Jesus freaks are just part of the phenomenon.

Spiritualists tuned into cosmic energy sit crosslegged pondering the void in an Atlanta commune. Followers of Kundalini Yoga form an extended family in Seattle. Spiritualist Steve Gasin and his 40-bus caravan criss-cross America sending out vibrations and keeping high on energy and truth.

Hare Krishna develops communes in virtually every city.

Sorcery and Satanism cults re-appear in the exotic atmosphere of California. A 22-year-old woman in Albuquerque feels



A member of the Jesus Peoples group, his banner on the ground, prays during a rally winding up the Jesus Peoples Spiritual Revolution Week in Seattle early in April. There has been a religious resurgence among young people of the Alternative Society. (AP Wirephoto)

the call of the dark gods of the earth and decides her role is to be an earth mother.

The legend spreads that the Marxist-Leninist Mike Klonsky, of a commune as the mattress a revolutionary, consults his I on the floor.

Names like Lord Shiva Shakti, words like chakra karma, resound through other society's vocabulary. Meher Baba freaks, Mhan Freaks, Jesus freaks, even daism freaks are part of the scene in Berkeley, in Madison Albuquerque—where ever the Alternative Society is trying to put a life together.

One common strand through the profusion of belief God can be found everywhere but he can't be reached easily through an established church be it Catholic, Protestant or Jewish.

Mention of orthodox Christianity is almost enough to make Jesus freak lose his smile. "They've driven the you away by the millions," said heroin addict Dennis. "There's no real spirit there."

The outpouring of religious fervor reflects the anarchistic spirit of the Alternative Society. No Moses has yet arrived with a new set of Commandments.

And even if one did, he would undoubtedly be put down for egg tripping or power tripping.

But certain values are shared: one must not exploit another either directly or through manipulation; one must share with his brothers and sisters; one must not despoil the earth; one must learn to grow and be open to the vibrations within one's self and from outside.

These values, as tarnished as they often are within the Alternative Society, admit of no nationalism. The death of a nameless is as keenly felt in the Alternative Society as the death of an American GI. Mr. Nat-grace is seen in a militaristic strategy designed to save Asian lives at the expense of American lives.

That is one reason why the Indochina War generates a real sense of guilt in the other American—a guilt that in turn generates religious fervor.

"The time we spend smoking dope, making love and grooving on people is bought with people dying. By their deaths they are buying time for us to live," said Michael, a PhD dropout in Albuquerque.

Another fact

## How Renault scrimps

cal apocolypse is near at hand. "Rehearse for the Apocolypse," says the Atlanta Oracle, which casts a con eye on the durability of a technological society. "Appreciating social services and products, most appear over the next 10 dis- years, we suggest this little 20 run: turn off your gas, turn off your water, turn off your telephone, turn off your heat, turn off your electricity, sit naked on the floor and repeat this chant—progress is our most important product, progress is our. . ."

The revolt against technology and the subsequent back-to-earth movement are laced with religious strains.

What is natural is good. The earth is good, particularly that part of it untrammelled by technology and its steel, plastic and chemicals. The gods of the earth are also good: the living spirit of a tree, a mountain, lake. One can learn to experience them, directly and intuitively, the way an animal experiences a forest or a fish a stream.

It helps if one has tripped on LSD.

"Say hello to God for me," a volunteer at the movement Switchboard in Berkeley tells an acid-tripping caller.

"Acid is a spiritual experience, for sure," says Corky in the Jesus House in Taos. "But with Jesus, I have found the real spirit of love and I doubt that the spiritual experience acid is the same thing."

Acid is often a starting point, but outside of the cults that use drugs such as peyote as part of their religious ceremonies, few of the Alternative Society's believers use drugs.

"I find I can get high now anytime I want to," says a Seattle Buddhist. "And I don't need drugs to do it."

But if past drug experience is a common denominator among the new religionists, the drug culture itself and its often seedy morality is part of what they are reacting against.

Decadence is a oft-repeated word and it is not used solely to describe Plastik Amerika. Sometimes it is applied to the movement, too.

Revolutionary Jeff Dowd, among seven Seattle men attacked for exploiting women in the Sun Dance Collective, disagreed with some of the harsh quotes the women attributed to him. He didn't disagree with the conditions of life they described.

"What they were saying about our life in the movement as being decadent was true," Dowd conceded.