

“And We’ve Got to Get Ourselves Back to the Garden”: The Jesus People Movement in Toronto

BRUCE DOUVILLE
York University

I came upon a child of God;
He was walking along the road,
And I asked him, ‘Where are you going?’
And this he told me:
“I’m going on down to Yasgur’s farm;
I’m going to join in a rock ‘n’ roll band,
I’m going to camp out on the land,
And try and get my soul free.”
We are stardust,
We are golden.
And we’ve got to get ourselves
Back to the garden.¹

At its core, the counter-culture of the late 1960s and early 1970s was a movement for emotional and spiritual liberation. The young people of the generation immortalized in Joni Mitchell’s “Woodstock” sought to free their souls, and articulate for themselves what it meant to be children of God. In William McLoughlin’s words, the “young were far from irreligious, but they sang and marched to a different beat and saw the world in a different light.”² They proclaimed a message of peace and love, and they denounced warmongering, consumerism, and an “establishment” system that they found de-humanizing. With spiritual values such as these, it is little wonder that many of them responded readily to Christianity.

The Jesus People movement³ took place when many hippies turned

from eastern mysticism to Pentecostal Christianity, from “free love” to the love of God, and from street pharmaceuticals to being “filled with the Spirit.” In many ways, the movement was an extension of the counter-culture. The “Jesus freaks” retained the “hip” vocabulary, long hair, unorthodox clothing, psychedelic artwork and rock music. They also adopted the social institutions of the counter-culture: communes, coffeehouses, teach-ins, and rock festivals. These, however, are only surface similarities. The Jesus people shared much more fundamental characteristics with the hippies and student activists: their reaction against “technocracy” and materialism, their experiential focus, and their vitality. Equally as important were crucial differences between the two movements: the Jesus people were largely apolitical, unlike the counter-cultural left, and they explicitly rejected drug use, permissive sexuality, and the occult.

Both the Jesus movement and the secular counter-culture emerged in their prototypical forms in California in the late 1960s, and spread throughout the United States and Canada. In Toronto, the counter-culture manifested itself in the Yorkville hippie scene, Rochdale College, and activist organizations such as the Student Union for Peace Action.⁴ The Jesus movement manifested itself in communal experiments such as the Jesus Forever Family at Rochdale College and the House of Emmaus on Draper Street, and the large weekly worship services of “the Catacombs” at St. Paul’s Anglican Church, Bloor Street.⁵ While there were notable differences between the Canadian and American counter-cultures, the Jesus movement in Toronto was remarkably similar in nature to its prototype in southern California. There was little to distinguish the practices, theology, sociology, or eventual fate of the two groups. In this essay, I will explore the nature of the Jesus People movement – particularly its similarities to and differences from the broader counter-culture – using Toronto as my chief example. My primary sources are contemporary assessments of the Jesus People in mainstream Canadian publications, particularly the “Religion” section of the *Toronto Star*.

In the late 1960s, hippies, student activists, and sympathetic observers perceived the counter-culture to be a reaction against “technocracy.” Both terms – “counter-culture” and “technocracy” – gained wide currency through sociologist Theodore Roszak’s *The Making of a Counter Culture: Reflections on the Technocratic Society and Its Youthful Opposition*. Roszak defines technocracy as “that society in which those

who govern justify themselves by appeal to technical experts who, in turn, justify themselves by appeal to scientific forms of knowledge. And beyond the authority of science, there is no appeal.”⁶ In the dominant technocratic culture, Roszak explains, experts manage all aspects of life, and “the prime goal of the society is to keep the productive apparatus turning over efficiently.”⁷ In such a society, humans become technical beings, impersonal and unemotional. (As the persona in Joni Mitchell’s “Woodstock” describes it, “I feel to be a cog in something turning.”) It is a perfect form of totalitarianism, he argues, precisely because it is subliminal: “even those in the state and/or corporate structure who dominate our lives must find it impossible to conceive of themselves as the agents of a totalitarian control.”⁸ The counter-culture, then, was the conscious rejection of all institutions of technocratic social control.

As this essay will show, repudiating technocracy meant rejecting many traditional values. Two of these were economic: the sanctity of work, and of private property. Both were seen as aspects of de-humanizing materialism. The disdainful attitude of Toronto’s counter-culture towards private property is evident in the history of Rochdale College. On a grand scale, the college was an experiment in collective ownership, and it was also the site of many smaller experiments in communal living. For three years after Clarkson, Gordon and Company took ownership of the building, Rochdale residents resisted eviction.⁹ The counter-culture’s disdain for the Protestant work ethic is evident in Toronto hippie David DePoe’s observation, “Work isn’t everything, work isn’t holy.”¹⁰

Likewise, the Jesus People were not devoted to the Protestant work ethic. They did not oppose wage labour, but since Christ’s return was imminent, materialistic goals were unimportant, and long-term financial planning was foolish.¹¹ Susan Mousley, a sixteen-year-old resident of Rochdale’s Jesus Forever commune, believed that God led her to quit her job and, as she explained to a sceptical reporter, she awaited further direction from the Lord.¹² Philip Marchand wrote about Roy, a resident of the House of Emmaus, parents “wouldn’t mind it if Roy got a job. But he tells them only, ‘I’ll be patient, and the Lord will provide.’”¹³

From its inception, the Jesus People movement also embraced communal living. They wished to pattern themselves after the first-century followers of Christ, and many of them were impressed to discover that communal living was normative in the early church.¹⁴ Christian communes also served practical purposes. First, they provided accommodation, which was important since Jesus People ministered to a largely transient

population. Second, they provided relatively stable environments where new converts could avoid their old acquaintances and habits, and replace them with new ones. In Toronto, the two most well-known Jesus People communes were the House of Emmaus on Draper Street, and Jesus Forever Family on the third floor of Rochdale College.

Robert Vellick established the House of Emmaus as a result of a seminar he started at Rochdale College. Out of that seminar “came an awareness of the need for a body or community to grow together with.” In a 1971 *Toronto Star* article, Vellick explained the importance of community:

“You have to live Christianity,” Vellick points out. “It’s not out there somewhere – it’s right here between people. What’s missing in the churches is a deep personal relationship among the members. They don’t really know each other: how can they love in any depth?”¹⁵

Besides Vellick, whom the article describes as “a lean, bearded figure with the intense eyes of an Old Testament prophet,” and presumably his wife, an adult education teacher, the House of Emmaus also included about fifteen members.¹⁶ According to Vellick, many of them came from difficult backgrounds (i.e., drug use and home problems), though at least one associate of the House of Emmaus was a University of Toronto student.¹⁷ The residents engaged in street evangelism in Yorkville, and provided practical assistance to transients.¹⁸

According to one Rochdale College resident, the Jesus Forever group on the third floor was “one of the most stable communes in the building”:

They were the only cultural entity that ever came to Rochdale, squared off, and came out ahead. [Students who were not Jesus Freaks] would move in and would be crewcut, hard-working, do-their-homework-every-day students in September. By November they had dropped out and had gotten into politics and drugs and sex and all that s**t. The Hare Krishna moved in and moved out almost immediately because they kept losing members. But the Jesus Freaks had a cultural identity.¹⁹

The commune’s leader was a former drug dealer “who had a mouth full of rotten teeth, played guitar badly and sang much worse. But he was the actual charisma that held it all together.”²⁰ The Jesus Forever group

appears to have operated in a manner similar to the House of Emmaus, but its primary mission field was Rochdale itself. For example, Susan Mousley, mentioned above, was a Rochdale resident prior to converting and joining the third-floor Christian commune.²¹ In 1974, one of the group members told Tom Harpur that “the group had been looking at a house in case they were evicted along with other residents. ‘But we’d like to stay here because the need is greater.’”²²

The history of the movement in Toronto shows that the Jesus People shared the counter-cultural disdain for materialism. Without question, they had unique motives. Their apathetic attitude towards the Protestant work ethic probably reflected eschatological concerns rather than political ones. Likewise, their communalism was not an end in itself, but a means to achieving more effective evangelistic outreach and discipleship, and to strengthen the bonds of Christian community. Nevertheless, the Jesus People clearly distanced themselves from the economic values of the dominant technocratic society, because these values were not consistent with the gospel of Christ as they understood it.

Like their secular counterparts, the Jesus People also rejected other aspects of the technocratic culture: the primacy of intellectual expertise, logic and tradition. In its place, both the counter-culture and the Jesus movement embraced experience, emotion, and immediacy. Furthermore, because the dominant social institutions cherished these values that the counter-culture rejected – such as knowledge, training and historical continuity – the counter-culture was anti-institutional. One of these institutions was organized religion, which the Jesus People saw as being part of the problem, not the solution. Many churches, in turn, were uncomfortable with the Jesus People.

According to Doug Owsram, the counter-culture was “a romantic revolution, resisting the pre-eminence of the rational and scientific world.” For the youth of the 1960s, the rationality of the dominant culture “seemed to shut out the very possibilities of passion and experience”:

So few people find real love, argued one writer, because “severely dehumanized societies like North America in the grip of a liberal or materialistic philosophy destroy the ability to feel. We are a generation of romantics – unable to really touch one another – only to dream about it.”

Emotion had to be restored through experience. Without emotion both the

individual and the society became a mechanism rather than a living organism.²³

To restore their ability to feel, most hippies turned to drugs. Marijuana and LSD provided the kinds of experience that they craved to fill the emotional void. Indeed, many took LSD “as a semi-religious experience.”²⁴ Like the romantics of the previous century, the counter-culture glorified intense feelings and emotional experiences.

The Jesus People rejected drug use, but like their secular counterparts, they placed great emphasis on emotional experiences. Conversion was necessary for salvation, and for many Jesus People, it was a profoundly emotional experience. As Susan Mousley described it, “I never got around to speed that day. I didn’t need it. I was too high on the Lord . . . It was like somebody pouring something into me. He cleaned out the darkness. I was forgiven all my sins. It’s as if a door behind me had closed.”²⁵ Even more intense, for many of them, was the experience of being “filled with the Holy Spirit.” Like Pentecostals, most Jesus People believed that subsequent to salvation, all Christians must receive the baptism in the Holy Spirit, with the evidence of speaking in tongues.²⁶ When Roy, a House of Emmaus resident mentioned above, “felt the presence of the Holy Spirit in him for the first time, [it was] a presence like a spiritual high so powerful he couldn’t stand on his feet for five hours afterwards.”²⁷

It is no coincidence that Jesus People, many of them former drug users, used terms such as “spiritual high” and “trip” to describe these events. The Jesus “freaks” replaced narcotics with Christ and Holy Spirit. These experiences, however, were not merely ends in themselves. Rather, they were seen as proof that God was at work in their lives. When the doubting reporter questioned the validity of Susan Mousley’s religious experience, Mousley responded, “I got the gift of tongues eight hours after I became a Christian and I now have the gift of discernment.”²⁸ Powerful emotions and the “gifts of the Spirit” (e.g., speaking in tongues, physical healing, miracles) were evidence of God’s reality, and His presence. In contrast, a lack of emotion was perceived as evidence of God’s absence. “If you can’t get emotional,” Merla Watson of the Catacombs is quoted as saying, “I feel sorry for you.”²⁹

Critics of the Jesus People were most disturbed by their heavy reliance on emotion and experience. As Tom Harpur observed, the “emotionalism and the tendency to give simple answers to complex issues

could result in just another ‘trip’ destined to end in a rude shock once the initial ‘high’ is over.”³⁰ In their analysis of the movement in California, Ronald Enroth and his colleagues noted that Jesus People used experience as the criterion to determine the validity of Christianity, (i.e., “But I’ve had this experience, and I know it’s true. I know I’m right.”): “The Bible, however, exhorts its readers to test the spirits. Other persons have had other experiences, and for them these experiences have been most profound and earthshaking. According to what criterion can these competing experiences be judged? The criterion must lie outside the realm of experience itself.” Emotion and experience alone are not sufficient, Enroth argues. One must also use one’s intellect, and according to Enroth, this was something that many Jesus People were not prepared to do.³¹

The Jesus People movement inherited its anti-intellectualism and anti-traditionalism from the broader counter-culture. Owrham writes that “the emotionalism of the counter-culture made it impatient with intellectual canon,” and that the hippies and student activists “felt exempt from history.”³² Indeed, like other twentieth-century revolutionaries, they sought to liberate themselves from the burden of history. Centuries of accumulated scholarship in the sciences and humanities had failed to produce a just, peaceful society; therefore, cultivating one’s intellect was irrelevant at best, and harmful at worst. For Jesus People, all the truth that they needed could be found in the Bible, and in the leading of the Holy Spirit. The truth was out there, and the truth was simple. This attitude provoked the journalist who interviewed Susan Mousley to remark that the Jesus People were “victim[s] of a voluntary frontal lobotomy...Susan and the rest of her family don’t question life anymore. They’re not exercising the intelligence that distinguishes them from dogs and cats. Tame animals accept direction from their master, and the Jesus Forever family accepts direction from its master.”³³ While her criticism was extreme, even more sympathetic observers warned of the dangers of privileging experience over intellect. In a *Toronto Star* article about the Jesus People, W. Stafford Reid, a professor of Reformation history at the University of Guelph, remarked:

One other danger indicated by the Reformation is that of anti-intellectualism, with an over-emphasis upon emotion and personal experience. Groups with such tendencies arose in the sixteenth century but usually they were soon fragmented by divisions over experience, since all experiences were not the same. It was the groups that had a well-articulated structure of thought that survived and

ultimately exercised a wide influence.³⁴

Hand in hand with their distrust of intellectual cultivation and tradition, the Jesus People also distrusted the established churches – even evangelical churches. House of Emmaus leader Robert Vellick told Tom Harpur that churches “are trying to play patsy with God on the one hand and the world on the other; that’s why they’re just lukewarm.” One of his colleagues explained that they were not anti-church, and that many of them belonged to established congregations, but they felt “that too often the traditional churches are bound up in materialism and conformity to the world.” Their attitude reflected the primitivist drive of the movement. In Harpur’s words, they wanted “to be known simply as followers of Jesus – Jesus People – trying to embody apostolic Christianity in twentieth-century garb.” Their attitude also reflected the counter-cultural distrust of their parents’ generation and its institutions. In Vellick’s words, “this is a new generation, and we’re not in anybody’s camp.”³⁵

Unfortunately, the distrust between Jesus People and older Christians was mutual. When Roy of the House of Emmaus converted to Christianity, there remained a great deal of conflict between him and his Christian parents. “He had become a Jesus freak,” Marchand writes, “but the freak part was still almost as important as the Jesus part in the eyes of his parents. Now, in fact, his parents want him to show how Christian he is by getting a haircut and wearing decent clothes.”³⁶ Wilber Sutherland, a former worker with Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship, relates the episode of a Toronto church that had supported an effective Christian coffeehouse in Yorkville: “When some of the converts wanted to attend communion still in their ‘hippie’ garb, bare feet and all, there was strong opposition unless they ‘cleaned up.’ They chose to establish their own Sunday service instead.” When the issue was debated at a gathering of Toronto’s clergy, an evangelical minister “was very distressed at the thought of administering communion to these uncouth ‘kids’ who probably had never been baptized.”³⁷

Some established churches were able to bridge the distrust. Ronald Enroth and his colleagues provided several examples of “straight churches” that welcomed the Jesus People, perhaps the most successful being Pastor Chuck Smith’s Calvary Chapel in Santa Ana, California.³⁸ In London, Ontario, Rev. David Mack of King Street United Church allowed a group of Jesus People to host a regular Christian coffeehouse, known as Jesus Rap, in the church basement. The experience rejuvenated the church,

which had been on the verge of closing.³⁹ Furthermore, as the Jesus People matured, they concluded that the established church had much to offer. In 1974, Robert Vellick informed the *Toronto Star* that he had become a Roman Catholic, and the House of Emmaus was “an evangelical, Roman Catholic lay community.” Vellick made this move, he said, because he needed roots, and “you can’t completely cut yourself off from the history and tradition of the church.”⁴⁰ In the same article, David Mack noted that a significant number of the original Jesus People had eventually joined established churches. “Where the churches have been willing to bend in regard to worship and other structures,” Mack said, “the young people have come in and found a depth of tradition and knowledge they knew they themselves were lacking.”⁴¹

In the early days of the movement in Toronto, the Jesus People, like their secular counterparts, celebrated warm emotion and living experience. They rejected cold intellect and dead tradition, and they criticized the church, because they believed that it embodied these characteristics. Eventually, they came to believe that a living, experiential faith could not be divorced from the life and experience of the historic church, and that emotion could not be divorced from intellect. Undoubtedly, they would have agreed with Tom Harpur’s opinion that the optimum “would be a new religious synthesis where reason and emotion find again their proper balance. The Bible words about marriage are appropriate here as well. They say: ‘Those whom (which) God hath joined together let no man put asunder.’”⁴²

Another trait that the Jesus movement shared with the counterculture was its vitality. The hippie, the student activist, and the Jesus “freak” each made the same claim: that he belonged to a dynamic international grassroots movement, one that held the unique potential to transform society. Each movement grew rapidly, and was evangelistic and idealistic in nature. Moreover, the optimism and vigour of the counterculture was rooted in the Baby Boomers’ sense that they belonged to a special generation. The Jesus People shared this sense, but took it a step further: they believed that they belonged to the last generation before Christ’s return. Their intense interest in eschatology contributed to the dynamism of the movement.

Toronto’s best example of the Jesus movement’s rapid growth and vitality was the weekly gathering known as the Catacombs. In 1968, two students at Birchmount Park Collegiate approached Merv Watson, a music

teacher, about forming a Christian club at the school. They decided to call it The Catacombs Club, because they considered themselves “an underground presence on the high school scene.” By the following year, the Catacombs had developed into a charismatic prayer group that met in individual homes.⁴³ The group grew rapidly, and kept moving its prayer meetings to larger venues: from private living rooms to the basement of Bathurst Street United Church, to Cody Hall at St. Paul’s Anglican Church, Bloor Street, and ultimately to the sanctuary of St. Paul’s.⁴⁴ In 1972, Tom Harpur observed that there were about four hundred to five hundred, largely teenagers, in attendance at the weekly Thursday night meetings, and in 1974, he reported attendance of up to one thousand.⁴⁵ According to Merv Watson, about thirty to forty per cent of those attending were Jesus People, while the remainder were “straight kids from every church and from every part of town.” They were drawn by the exuberant, Pentecostal-style worship (i.e., raising one’s hand in prayer, praying out loud and “speaking in tongues”). They were also drawn by the music ministry of Merv and Merla Watson, who often performed their own compositions. Tom Harpur described the Catacombs gatherings as “a mixture of the old-time revival meeting, a modern hootenanny and a classical concert.”⁴⁶ Clearly, the group members were convinced that something exciting and unique was happening at the Catacombs. Many church pastors throughout southern Ontario were also convinced, and they chartered buses so that their youth groups could take part in the experience.⁴⁷

This sense of uniqueness had its roots in the Baby Boomers’ sense of being special, both personally as individuals, and collectively as an emerging generation. Doug Owrarn attributes this trait to several factors. Parents, who had lived through times of deprivation and disruption, aspired to provide a materially and emotionally secure environment for their children. The affluence generated by a booming postwar economy led young people to believe that they occupied a world without limits. Finally, the Baby Boomers were conscious of their demographic importance. “For a period of twenty to twenty-five years,” Owrarn writes, “not only was there demographic imbalance, but that imbalance tilted the values and politics of the Canadian nation towards the values and politics of Canadian youth.” From the vantage point of hippies and student activists, they belonged to a generation with substantial power and unlimited opportunities.⁴⁸

For Jesus People, their generation was indeed special, not simply

because of its demographic importance, but because they believed it to be the final generation before the second coming of Jesus Christ. Their expectation of Christ's imminent return rested on two principal lines of argument, both involving biblical prophecy. First of all, they were convinced that the Jesus movement itself was a fulfilment of the Old Testament prophet Joel's prediction that in the last days, God would pour out His Spirit, and that miracles would occur. Enroth explains:

In his sermon on the day of Pentecost, Peter quoted that prophecy ... But since the Jesus People collapse all history between the Book of Acts and the present moment, they see themselves as the continuing fulfilment of Joel's words. As the church in the Book of Acts represented "the former rain" that brought the first fruits, the Jesus People adhere to the standard Pentecostalist view that they are "the latter rain" referred to by the prophets and that will immediately precede the second coming.⁴⁹

Their other line of argument was to point to the turbulent world of the late 1960s and early 1970s as fulfilments of biblical prophecy, and harbingers of Christ's return. Many Jesus People read Hal Lindsey's *The Late Great Planet Earth*, which argued that world events indicated that Christ's second advent may be imminent.⁵⁰ Jesus People in Toronto eagerly awaited that final event. Toronto's Jesus People publication was entitled *Maranatha*, the Aramaic term for "Come, Lord."⁵¹ Roy told journalist Philip Marchand "that the Second Coming might be indicated as well by the fact that the ranks of Christians are swelling: 'Down at the House of Emmaus there's been, in the past two weeks, somebody saved every night.'⁵²

Furthermore, many Jesus People were preoccupied by the eschatological importance of the state of Israel. They believed that the 1948 re-establishment of the state of Israel and the 1967 reclamation of the holy sites of Old Jerusalem paved the way for the eventual building of the third Temple.⁵³ They also believed that many Jews would convert to Christ in the last days. For this reason, Jesus People were keenly interested in efforts to spread the gospel in Israel, and in the development of Messianic Judaism (i.e., Jews who believe that Jesus is the Messiah). In 1972, Merv and Merla Watson informed a gathering of the Catacombs "how they believe God is calling them to a special ministry in the Holy Land," and by May 1974, the two had left the Catacombs and formed a new group, whose "members aim at 'ministering to Jews' through music and praise."⁵⁴

Though many would dismiss such missionary efforts as, at best, quixotic, they are an example of the vitality and optimism of a movement eager to save as many souls as it could before Christ's imminent return.

Without question, the Jesus People owed much of their excitement and evangelistic energy to their confidence that these were the last days, and that their movement was a special end-times dispensation from God. However, while this confidence offered short-term benefits (i.e., motivation, rapid growth), it posed long-term dangers for the movement. Enroth and his colleagues concluded that after talking to California's Jesus People, "we felt that Christ had better come soon, because they could not long sustain the emotional high and the intensity of life that they were presently enjoying."⁵⁵ Disillusionment and waning enthusiasm, they feared, could cause the movement to decline rapidly. Despite such concerns, the Jesus People retained their vitality. As with any religious revival, many conversions proved to be ephemeral; many, however, proved to be lasting. The Catacombs, for example, maintained its momentum well into the 1970s, and continued to exist until the late 1980s – long after the demise of the Yorkville hippie scene, SUPA, and Rochdale College. Clearly, the Jesus movement was both energetic and relatively durable.

So far, this essay has examined the similarities between the Jesus movement and the counter-culture. However, one must not minimize the differences between the two groups. Unlike their secular counterparts, the Jesus People were essentially apolitical. They did not engage in social or political activism, because Christ's second advent was the only solution for social injustice. Moreover, the Jesus movement was an explicit reaction to and repudiation of significant parts of the counter-culture: chaos, drug use, permissive sexuality, and non-Christian spirituality.

Social and political protest was the most visible aspect of the counter-culture. In Toronto, New Left activists demonstrated against the Vietnam War, occupied the University of Toronto senate chamber to "stop the power structure," and formed a variety of protest groups.⁵⁶ However, there is no evidence that Toronto's Jesus People took part in any events to protest systemic poverty, the Vietnam War, nuclear proliferation, or any of the other causes of the New Left social activists. The Jesus People's lifestyle may have been an implicit rebuke to materialism, but they did not work to create a society in which material wealth was redistributed to meet human needs. Indeed, to the extent that they had anything to say about

politics, it was to support the power structure. At Rochdale, for example, some students were upset when it appeared that the Jesus Forever Family was too closely aligned to Clarkson, Gordon and Company:

When Clarkson gave the Jesus People a rent-free room, suspicions immediately came to a boil. Alex MacDonald expresses some of them: "Jesus freaks do as they're told. When the Clarkson Company told them to get out, they were one of the very, very few groups in the building who said okay and left. They didn't go to court; they didn't fight it. "Authority is good." Certain of their members were on staff – they got down that low."⁵⁷

In the contemporary news sources reviewed for this essay, Jesus People mentioned social and political evils only to explain why so many young people were turning to Christianity, or to hold them up as signs that Christ was coming soon.⁵⁸ Undoubtedly, their firm belief in an imminent apocalypse was an important reason for their indifference to social and political activism. The kingdoms of this world, they believed, were dominated by Satan, and no amount of amelioration could bring about a just society. Conversion was an individual affair, not a social one.⁵⁹

Consequently, the Jesus People were activists, but their activism was aimed at saving individuals rather than saving society. And in the mission fields of the counter-culture, they found many that desperately needed saving. The Jesus People were unequivocal in their denunciations of many aspects of the counter-cultural lifestyle. Most of the individuals featured in contemporary news articles on the Jesus movement were refugees from that lifestyle. Robert Vellick had been a drug user and a student of the occult.⁶⁰ Likewise, Roy of the House of Emmaus, and Susan Mousley of the Jesus Forever Family had been heavy drug users.⁶¹ Finally, the leader of the Jesus Forever commune had been a drug dealer, who reportedly became a Christian following a prolonged LSD trip.⁶² These young people believed that by turning to Christ, they were set free from substance abuse and other self-destructive behaviours. Without question, the Jesus People could have done more to respond to the relevant social and political issues of the early 1970s. Nevertheless, while they did not restructure society, they managed to restructure their own lives.

On a theological level, there was little to distinguish the Jesus People from Pentecostals in the "straight" churches. Jesus People believed in biblical inerrancy, justification by faith, baptism in the Holy Spirit, the

pre-millennial return of Jesus Christ, and adult baptism by immersion. In spite of these similarities, however, they knew that there were substantial differences between their movement and “old-time religion.” In fact, theologian Erling Jorstad calls the Jesus movement a “new-time religion.” He contends that previous revivals in late-nineteenth and twentieth-century America affirmed traditional values. In contrast, he argues, the Jesus movement repudiated nationalism, materialism, and the institutional church.⁶³ The Jesus People combined evangelical faith with the counter-cultural rejection of technocracy. It is for this reason that some within the movement called it the “Jesus Revolution.”

The Jesus movement may not have been a revolution, but what was it? There are three other possibilities to consider: reaction, revitalization or revival. The first two terms come from William McLoughlin’s *Revivals, Awakenings and Reform*. Citing the work of Anthony F.C. Wallace, McLoughlin argues that as a society develops, it reaches a crisis point at which its traditional values are no longer practicable. When this “period of cultural distortion” occurs, there are two possible responses. The first is reaction: a traditionalist movement emerges, led “by those with rigid personalities or with much at stake in the older order.” Their solution is to “call for a return to the ‘old-time religion,’” and “find scapegoats in their midst...upon whom they can project their fear.” Ultimately, Wallace explains, this response is unsuccessful, and the only viable response is revitalization. He defines this as the process in which charismatic individuals lead the society to accept new “mazeways” – new values and mores to replace the old, unworkable ones.⁶⁴

In one sense, the Jesus movement was a reaction – to the trauma, excesses and instability of the late 1960s and early 1970s. The values and beliefs that its adherents embraced were, in many respects, very traditional indeed. However, these were not the values of the dominant, technocratic society of the twentieth century. The Jesus People responded to gospel’s promise that Christ would “make all things new,” and their lives were changed. To dismiss the Jesus people as mere “reactionaries” fails to capture the nuances and complexities of this movement.

In another sense, the Jesus movement was a revitalization. However, it did not revitalize North American society, but rather one segment of that society; namely, the sub-culture of evangelical Christianity.⁶⁵ As the Jesus People matured, many of them made peace with the institutional church, and became members. Others joined the new denominations that emerged from the movement, notably Calvary Chapel and the Vineyard fellow-

ships.⁶⁶ In addition, many current leaders in the North American evangelical community were influenced by the movement in its early days.⁶⁷ The Jesus movement was clearly “private” religion, in the sense that José Casanova uses the term to distinguish it from “public” religion. Ironically, however, the energy that the Jesus People infused into the North American church undoubtedly contributed to the “Year of the Evangelical” in 1976, and may have contributed to the “deprivatization” of evangelical Christianity in the late 1970s and early 1980s.⁶⁸

Some evangelical Christian scholars of the movement propose a third possibility, that it was a revival – a divine intervention in human history. Both Di Sabatino and Jorstad endorse this interpretation of the Jesus People movement.⁶⁹ Clearly, few academics would find this a satisfactory explanation. Nevertheless, one must acknowledge that this is how the Jesus People themselves understood it. Yet even if one sees the movement – quite literally – as the work of a *deus ex machina*, it was a still a drama that involved human players, with human motives and fallibilities. In other words, one can believe that the movement had transcendent dimensions *and* still analyze its sociological or psychological dimensions.

More research needs to be done on the Canadian Jesus People movement. This essay only focused on Toronto, and did not examine issues of race, class, or gender. Furthermore, this study had little to say about evangelical Christian student groups at Toronto’s post-secondary institutions, particularly the University of Toronto. Did these groups attempt to reach out to student radicals (i.e., as the Christian World Liberation Front did at University of California at Berkeley)?⁷⁰ If so, how successful were they? Also, if history is to be understood as a dialogue, then it is important to find out how the hippies and New Left activists responded to the Jesus People. Furthermore, what role did evangelical churches in downtown Toronto play in reaching out to hippies, or to Jesus People? Finally, what can the movement tell us about the nature of secularization (in all three senses of the word as José Casanova defines it) in urban Canada during the 1960s and 1970s?⁷¹

This essay began with the “Woodstock” generation, and its search for emotional and spiritual freedom. In Joni Mitchell’s song, the child of God looked for this freedom at Yasgur’s farm. In Toronto in the early 1970s, other children of God looked for this freedom at a communal house on Draper Street, or at a Thursday night prayer meeting at St. Paul’s Church. Both the counter-culture and the Jesus movement were attempts

to get “back to the garden,” to an idyllic world that transcended technocracy and materialism. While the Jesus People could not recreate Eden, they did create Christian communities that celebrated mutual support, emotional warmth, and spiritual freedom, as they understood it.

Endnotes

1. Joni Mitchell, “Woodstock,” from *Ladies of the Canyon*, Reprise Records, 1970.
2. William G. McLoughlin, *Revivals, Awakenings and Reform: An Essay on Religion and Social Change in America, 1607-1977* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 210.
3. Throughout this essay, I will use the terms “Jesus People movement” and “Jesus movement” interchangeably. At least one scholar prefers the former term, since the latter is often used to denote first-century Christianity. See David Di Sabatino, “The Spiritual Sixties and the Jesus People Movement,” introduction to *The Jesus People Movement: An Annotated Bibliography and General Resource* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1999), 4n.
4. Doug Owsram, *Born at the Right Time: A History of the Baby Boom Generation* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 185-307.
5. Di Sabatino, “The Spiritual Sixties,” 13.
6. Theodore Roszak, *The Making of a Counter Culture: Reflections on the Technocratic Society and Its Youthful Opposition* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1968), 8.
7. Roszak, *The Making of a Counter Culture*, 7.
8. Roszak, *The Making of a Counter Culture*, 9.
9. Roszak, *The Making of a Counter Culture*, 185-86. See also David Sharpe, *Rochdale, the Runaway College* (Toronto: Anansi, 1987); and Henry Mietkiewicz and Bob Mackowycz, *Dream Tower: The Life and Legacy of Rochdale College* (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1988).
10. Owsram, *Born at the Right Time*, 205.
11. Pre-millennial eschatology, especially the belief that the *parousia* would occur in their lifetime, was a central part of the theology of the Jesus People. It did not merely influence their actions; it determined them. The importance of eschatology in the Jesus movement will be discussed at greater length later in this essay (see Ronald M. Enroth, Edward E. Ericson, Jr., and C. Breckinridge

Peters, *The Jesus People: Old-Time Religion in the Age of Aquarius* [Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1972], 179-93).

12. Heather Chisvin, "The Conversion of Susan Mousley," *Miss Chatelaine* 8, no. 6 (18 November 1971): 75, 97. By the end of article, Chisvin informs readers that Susan felt led to return to complete her high school education.
13. Philip Marchand, "Moments of Grace in Sinful Toronto," *Saturday Night* 86 (November 1971): 35.
14. David Di Sabatino, "The Jesus People Movement: Counterculture Revival and Evangelical Renewal" (MTS thesis, McMaster Divinity College, 1994), 36. Also, see Enroth, et al., *The Jesus People*, 207-20.
15. Tom Harpur, "'Turning on with Jesus': Fad or True Revival?" *Toronto Star*, 28 August 1971, 81.
16. Marchand, "Moments of Grace," 35.
17. Robert Douglas, "Jesus Movement comes to Toronto," *Toronto Star*, 8 May 1971, 61.
18. Harper, "Turning on with Jesus"; and Marchand, "Moments of Grace," 35.
19. Sharpe, *Rochdale*, 137.
20. Mietkiewicz and Mackowycz, *Dream Tower*, 48-9.
21. Chisvin, "Conversion of Susan Mousley," 97-8.
22. Tom Harpur, "Jesus People blend into the 'straight' churches," *Toronto Star*, 11 May 1974, 4(E).
23. Owram, *Born at the Right Time*, 205-6.
24. Owram, *Born at the Right Time*, 209.
25. Chisvin, "Conversion of Susan Mousley," 98.
26. Enroth, et al., *The Jesus People*, 194-220.
27. Marchand, "Moments of Grace," 35.
28. Chisvin, "Conversion of Susan Mousley," 99.
29. Tom Harpur, "Fervent teenagers say: Isn't Jesus wonderful!" *Toronto Star*, 19 February 1972, 85.
30. Harpur, "Fervent teenagers say: Isn't Jesus wonderful!" 85.

31. Enroth, et al., *The Jesus People*, 164-68.
32. Owram, *Born at the Right Time*, 208.
33. Chisvin, "Conversion of Susan Mousley," 99-100.
34. Reid mentioned Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion* as one example of such a "well-articulated structure of thought." Since Reid is also a Presbyterian minister, his example is not surprising (W. Stafford Reid, "Jesus People may bring about a new Reformation," *Toronto Star*, 18 September 1971, 85).
35. Harpur, "Turning on with Jesus."
36. Marchand, "Moments of Grace," 35.
37. Wilber Sutherland, "Some reached out, some rejected Jesus People," *Christian Week*, 14 February 1995, 11.
38. Enroth, et al., *The Jesus People*, 84-101.
39. Jim Sheppard, "High on Jesus," *United Church Observer* (November 1972), 24-6.
40. Harpur, "Jesus People blend into the 'straight' churches."
41. Harpur, "Jesus People blend into the 'straight' churches."
42. Tom Harpur, "Revivalism is sweeping North America," *Toronto Star*, 15 June 1974, 5(H).
43. Di Sabatino, "The Jesus People Movement: Counterculture Revival and Evangelical Renewal," 65-68.
44. Al Reimers, *God's Country: Charismatic Renewal* (Toronto: G.R. Welch, 1979), 23.
45. Harpur, "Fervent teenagers say: Isn't Jesus wonderful!"; and Harpur, "Jesus People blend into the 'straight' churches." Di Sabatino claims that attendance "steadily ranged between 2,000 and 2,500 during a three year peak period," though he doesn't specify when that was – possibly in the late 1970s ("The Jesus People Movement: Counterculture Revival and Evangelical Renewal," 67).
46. Harpur, "Fervent teenagers say: Isn't Jesus wonderful!"
47. Di Sabatino, "The Jesus People Movement: Counterculture Revival and Evangelical Renewal," 67.

48. Owram, *Born at the Right Time*, 308-11. One potential weakness in Owram's thesis is that many Canadians did not share in this postwar affluence. Indeed, the bulk of his book deals with middle-class and upper-middle-class baby boomers. Several chapters deal particularly with university students in the 1960s. While the post-secondary system expanded enormously in these years, university students still represented an affluent minority of baby boomers. Furthermore the student radicals Owram writes about were a minority within that middle-class minority. In spite of these reservations, I still find his analysis useful.
49. Enroth, et al., *The Jesus People*, 184.
50. Enroth, et al., *The Jesus People*, 187-90.
51. Douglas, "Jesus Movement comes to Toronto."
52. Marchand, "Moments of Grace," 36.
53. Enroth, et al., *The Jesus People*, 187-88.
54. Harpur, "Fervent teenagers say: Isn't Jesus wonderful!"; and Harpur, "Jesus People blend into the 'straight' churches." Eventually, Merv and Merla Watson moved to Israel.
55. Enroth, et al., *The Jesus People*, 241.
56. Owram, *Born at the Right Time*, 224, 233, 293-96.
57. Sharpe, *Rochdale*, 264.
58. Douglas, "Jesus Movement comes to Toronto"; and Marchand, "Moments of Grace," 36.
59. Enroth, et al., *The Jesus People*, 172-74.
60. Harpur, "'Turning on with Jesus.'"
61. Marchand, "Moments of Grace," 34-35; and Chisvin, "Conversion of Susan Mousley," 97-98.
62. "He'd been a dope dealer. And at one point, the cops nabbed him but forgot to search him. So he did all this acid – eighteen hits – in the back of a police car. When the cops realized what had happened, they got pissed off and threw him out of the car in the middle of the night in High Park. He told me that he just walked around High Park for two days and two nights because he couldn't find his way out. He just kept walking in circles. And since he was on acid the whole time, Jesus kept popping out from behind the trees and pointing to him. So he took that as a sign and he became born again"

- (Mietkiewicz and Mackowycz, *Dream Tower*, 48-49).
63. Erling Jorstad, *That New-Time Religion: The Jesus Revival in America* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1972), 120-22.
 64. McLoughlin, *Revivals, Awakenings and Reform*, 12-16.
 65. Di Sabatino, "The Spiritual Sixties," 18-19.
 66. Incidentally, the "Toronto Blessing" of the 1990s, which had a powerful impact on charismatic and Pentecostal churches throughout the world, began in a Toronto Vineyard fellowship.
 67. The American televangelist, Benny Hinn, was involved in the Catacombs when he lived in Toronto. Di Sabatino, "The Jesus People Movement: Counterculture Revival and Evangelical Renewal," 68n.
 68. José Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 11-74, 135-66.
 69. Di Sabatino, "The Jesus People Movement: Counterculture Revival and Evangelical Renewal," 14-15; and Jorstad, *That New-Time Religion*, 120. It should be noted that Enroth and his colleagues are also evangelicals, but they are critical of several traits of the Jesus People: "their simplistic mentality, the excessive emphasis on experience and feeling, and their bias against intellectual pursuits, social involvement, and human culture in general." They avoid passing judgment on the movement as a whole, for to do so "would be to fall into their own error of oversimplification" (17).
 70. Enroth, et al., *The Jesus People*, 102-14.
 71. Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World*, 211-34. Casanova distinguishes between three meanings of secularization: differentiation, decline and de-politicization.