

American “Counter-Revolutions” of the 50’s & 60’s

1947 – Executive Order 9981 (President Harry Truman) “It is hereby declared to be the policy of the President that there shall be equality of treatment and opportunity for all persons in the armed services without regard to race, color, religion or national origin. This policy shall be put into effect as rapidly as possible, having due regard to the time required to effectuate any necessary changes without impairing efficiency or morale.” The actual desegregation of the Army did not take place until during the Korean War. This certainly helped set the stage for the later Civil Rights Movement.

1950’s – The “Beat” Generation began among certain non-conformist students at Columbia University (NYC) during the late 40’s, but soon found its way to San Francisco, where, after the failed 1957 obscenity trial against Allen Ginsburg’s performance poem, *Howl*, it became entrenched. Its proponents experimented with drugs, were involved in alternative forms of sexuality, had an interest in Eastern religion, rejected the perceived materialism of the American dream, and felt the need to boldly express their own ideals.

1954 – Senator Lyndon Johnson slipped in an amendment to the tax code which forbade not-for-profit entities [501(c)(3), a category which includes churches] from endorsing or opposing political candidates. The threat of enforcing this code has since been used to keep conservative Christian organizations out of the political process. Strangely, the blatant political activities of liberal “Christian” organizations are typically ignored.

1954 – The Supreme Court decides 9-0 in Brown vs. Board of Education that “in the field of public education, the doctrine of ‘separate but equal’ has no place.” This pretty much kicked off the Civil Rights Movement of the late 1950’s into the 1960’s.

1958 – The Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament began with a “Ban the Bomb” demonstration in London’s Trafalgar Square. The emblem adopted for this movement soon became the familiar “Peace Symbol.”¹

1960’s – The American Sixties Counter-culture got a lot of its energy from young adults who had grown up during World War II & the Korean Conflict. They, and the “baby-boomer” teenagers coming up just below them, felt the need to reject the “norms” of their parents & grandparents.

- They supported the goals & the pacifist methods of the Civil Rights Movement.
- They were against war in general & the Vietnam War in particular.
- They were “into” Eastern & native-American religions & the use of psychedelic drugs.
- They were “into” communal events & “free love.”
- They were “into” new styles of music; in particular, “Rock & Roll.”

“Beatlemania” took hold in America after the “Fab Four’s” 1964 appearance on the Ed Sullivan Show. In 1966, John Lennon said in an interview, “Christianity will go. It will vanish and shrink. I needn’t argue about that; I’m right and I’ll be proved right. We’re more popular than Jesus now; I don’t know which will go first—rock ‘n’ roll or Christianity. Jesus was all right but his disciples were thick and ordinary. It’s them twisting it that ruins it for me.”

¹ According to the designer, Gerald Holtom, the design started out as a white circle within a black square. He added a cross to the circle, but this was quickly rejected by others as being too likely confused with the major symbol of Christianity. So Holtom dropped the arms of the cross, making them into a combination of the semaphore letters “N” & “D” (for “Nuclear Disarmament”). In addition he later wrote that he thought that the symbol could just as easily represent “an individual in despair, with hands palm outstretched outwards and downwards in the manner of Goya’s peasant before the firing squad.”

The “Hippies” Exemplify the “High” (*pun intended*) Point of American Counter-Culture

Psychedelic drug use was studied & promoted by Dr. Timothy Leary, once a professor at Harvard. In 1966 he said, “Like every great religion of the past we seek to find the divinity within and to express this revelation in a life of glorification and the worship of God. These ancient goals we define in the metaphor of the present — turn on, tune in, drop out.”

1967 – (JAN) Timothy Leary kicked off the “Human Be-In” in the Haight-Ashbury neighborhood of San Francisco to oppose California’s new anti-LSD law (approximately 30,000 participated)

1967 – The “Summer of Love” in Haight-Ashbury (approximately 100,000 participated)

1968 – The Woodstock Festival about 80 miles NW of NYC (approximately 600,000 attended)

Common to all three: “Sex, drugs and Rock & Roll”

The “Jesus Movement” & Its Lasting Impact

This was a “counter-counter-revolution.” At the center of it was Calvary Chapel, established in 1968 by Pastor Chuck Smith. Calvary Chapel used beach evangelism, specifically targeting the hippies, who were welcomed into a “casual-dress” worship service, where “contemporary” Christian music was used & a verse-by-verse Bible teaching style was utilized. The growth of Calvary Chapel “affiliated” congregations during the past 40 years represents the most significant growth within American Christendom during the 20th Century.

Some other ongoing outgrowths of this “counter-counter-revolution” include:

- MUSIC: Contemporary Christian Music exploded out of the late 1960’s & early 1970’s. It now typically “converts” (via Christian lyrics) every new style of music as it arises.
- MEDIA: Christian radio, TV & entertainment became widespread after the early 1970’s.
- POLITICS: The “Christian/Religious Right” arose during the 1970’s, taking a stand against all the cultural shifts that had occurred in 20th Century America. Although Falwell’s “Moral Majority” (1979-1989) is now long gone, there are many other conservative-Christian, politically-oriented groups still in existence.
- CHURCH SERVICE: The “Seeker Sensitive” church growth model used at Willow Creek Community Church near Chicago (founded 1975) & Saddleback Church in Orange County California (founded 1980) was intended to attract non-Christians into a more “inviting” Christian environment. This was done by toning down the “harsh” doctrinal elements of Christianity and by engaging the “perceived needs” of their communities. Willow Creek² & Saddleback³ are now two of America’s best known “mega-churches,” with around 25,000 weekly attendees each. Many of the other “mega-churches” just happen to be Calvary Chapel affiliated congregations which continue to use the blatantly Christian verse-by-verse teaching format of Chuck Smith, still combined with “casual dress” and contemporary music.
- THE POLARIZATION OF AMERICAN CHRISTIANITY, EVEN AS IN AMERICAN POLITICS

² Interestingly enough, after surveying the effectiveness of their “seeker sensitive” model, Willow Creek was surprised to discover that just getting people involved in the activities at Willow Creek didn’t necessarily result in spiritual growth and maturity. [Well, “Duh!”] You can read Bill Hybels 2007 article regarding this issue at: http://www.informz.net/pfm/archives/archive_529389.html.

³ Rick Warren, the founding pastor of Saddleback, has a P.E.A.C.E. plan - "Promote reconciliation - Equip servant leaders - Assist the poor - Care for the sick - Educate the next generation." While the first item might include some veiled reference to the actual centerpiece of Christianity – the Atonement of Christ – Warren’s plan seems more devoted to “social justice.”

SOME PERSONAL OBSERVATIONS REGARDING 20TH CENTURY AMERICAN CHRISTIANITY

THE RELIGIOUS LEFT TENDS TO...	THE RELIGIOUS RIGHT TENDS TO...
Consider Scripture an evolutionary, human product.	Consider Scripture as the inspired Word of God.
Reject the Biblical story of Creation as religious myth.	Accept the Biblical story of Creation as fact.
Accept the theory of evolution as a fact.	Reject the theory of evolution as a humanist myth.
Consider marriage an outdated, patriarchal construct.	Consider marriage a God-given institution.
Consider Satan a human personification of evil.	Consider Satan a real entity & the enemy of Humanity.
Consider “The Flood” a local, Mesopotamian myth.	Consider “The Flood” a factual, global event.
Believe the Biblical story about the destruction of Sodom & Gomorrah was a myth intended to condemn selfishness & inhospitality, not homosexuality.	Believe the Biblical story about the destruction of Sodom & Gomorrah was factual and, in part, a specific condemnation of homosexuality.
Reject the “Virgin Birth” as religious myth.	Accept the “Virgin Birth” as fulfilled prophecy.
Believe that Jesus lived an exemplary human life.	Believe that Jesus, being God, became a man in order to save sinners via The Atonement & Resurrection.
Consider the death of Jesus as the death of a hero.	Consider the death of Jesus as The Atonement for sin.
Think of Jesus’ “Resurrection” as happening figuratively, in the hearts & minds of his followers.	Think of Jesus’ Resurrection as happening literally, in bodily fashion.
Think the gospel is about establishing “social justice,” including the redistribution of wealth.	Think the gospel is about evangelism among sinners & discipleship among saints.
To be pacifistic.	To accept the concept of just war.
To see government as an indispensable & good, God-given tool in accomplishing “social justice,” including the redistribution of wealth.	To see government as a necessary, but dangerous, God-given tool in keeping peace in a chaotic world.
Consider global governance as the mechanism by which Human Progress will reach its peaceful climax.	Consider global governance as the mechanism by which Humanity will engage in its final rebellion against God’s rule.
Think of the Millennium in terms of Humanity reaching a golden age via the peaceful pursuit of good teachers like Jesus.	Think of the Millennium in terms of Jesus’ literal return and his creation of a new heaven & new earth in which righteousness dwells.