

“Just Give Us the Word”; Counterculture and the Jesus People’s Army in Vancouver

1970-1971

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Introduction and Background

“*Jesus Army invades city*” was one of the headlines featured in *The Sun's* August 27th, 1970 issue. The article goes on to describe the arrival of the Jesus People’s Army in Vancouver. Seventy-five members in total attempt to cross the border– they get stopped by Canadian immigration services, and since they were honest about their criminal backgrounds (mostly consisting of drug charges), many are barred from entering the country. Twenty-seven of these seventy-five members post a \$50 bond each, which, when raised, “allowed [them] through on temporary permits”.¹ A few more make it across by “getting rides with ‘straight-looking’ people.”² In addition to these youths, many more make it across the border in the subsequent weeks. In all, over 125 of their followers flood into the city with big plans for setting up their first Canadian headquarters.³ From these Vancouver headquarters, they would branch off to the rest of the provinces, beginning with Alberta.⁴

The Jesus People’s Army (JPA) was a new religious movement (NRM) from the United States. It was a branch of the broader Jesus Movement that was active during the 1960s and 1970s. It intended to attract youths by putting a countercultural spin on evangelicalism, a branch of Protestantism that emphasizes conversion through spiritual rebirth.⁵ The JPA chapter of

¹ Don Hunter, “‘Soldiers’ of Jesus Army Suffer Border Casualties”, *The Province* (Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada), 27 August 1970.

² Lorne Mallin, ‘Jesus Army Invades City’, *The Sun* (Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada), 27 August 1970.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Pat Moan, ‘Jesus Army Goes East for Converts’, *The Sun* (Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada), 4 September 1970.

⁵ Evangelicalism is not new nor unique to the JPA. It has been around for hundreds of years in Britain and later came to the North American colonies. For more information about how it developed in the colonies, see Susan Juster, “‘BREAKING” THE SABBATH: The Evangelical Challenge in the Great Awakening’, in *Disorderly Women, Sexual Politics and Evangelicalism in Revolutionary New England* (Cornell University Press, 1994), <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7591/j.ctv5rdwc7.6>.

Vancouver was founded by Jim Palosaari and headed by Russell Griggs, who came with a group of 125 members from Seattle in the summer of 1970, ready to take Vancouver by storm.

This thesis intends to argue that young people in Vancouver were attracted to the JPA because they offered not only a new, less-rigid form of Christianity, but they also offered a variety of support services such as housing, food, employment, and drug detoxification. The JPA was able to form a community through religion and these modes of support, which many were attracted to. The JPA was able to advertise their meetings and their services in various public ways, including performing events like public baptisms, streetwitnessing (spreading their gospel in public), attending protests, and advertising in local schools, churches, and newspapers. They were successful in getting youth to join their organization because governmental support services were not being offered at the level they were needed, leaving organizations like the JPA the only option for some.

During the 1960s, the number of Kitsilano residents aged 20-24 increased by half, with approximately 3,000 people moving into a neighbourhood that had been predominantly composed of adults and seniors for the previous twenty years⁶ This shift in demographic made the area more attractive for transient youth, who began to travel to Vancouver by the thousands; “Vancouver became the destination for transient youth from across the country and by 1970 the media reported that 50,000 young people had descended on the city.”⁷

This demographic shift was influenced by the increase in low-rise apartment buildings and subdivisions along Love Street, a concentrated area of businesses that spanned five blocks in Kitsilano. The cheap rent and proximity to the University of British Columbia attracted many

⁶ Daniel Ross, ‘Panic on Love Street: Citizens and Local Government Respond to Vancouver’s Hippie Problem, 1967-68’, *BC Studies: The British Columbian Quarterly*, no. 180 (2013): 11–41, <https://doi.org/10.14288/bcs.v0i180.183962>, 16.

⁷ Tamara Gene Myers and Georgia Twiss, ‘The Rising (Street) Generation: The Vancouver Runaway Revolution and 1970s’ Child Saving’, *Urban History Review* 53, no. 2 (2025): 157–80, <https://doi.org/10.3138/uhr-2024-0021>, 163.

youths, including so-called “hippies.” Hippies, as Daniel Ross defines, was a catch-all category for rebellious youth, personified as long-haired drug-users.⁸ The majority did not choose to use this label— instead, it was one that Vancouver’s anti-hippie campaigners weaponized against the group.

The increase in hippies (and youth more generally) was threatening to the older generations, who saw them as a group who challenged the social order. In early 1967, anti-hippie sentiments soared following the election of Tom Campbell as Vancouver’s mayor. For the next six years, he remained in office and attempted to quash the so-called ‘hippie problem’.

⁸ Ross, 12.

Historiography

The scholarship surrounding New Religious Movements (NRMs), counterculture, and the Jesus People Movement has evolved significantly over the years. The literature relevant to the Jesus People's Army (JPA) in Vancouver can be grouped into three overlapping bodies of work: studies of NRMs and irreligion, histories of Canadian counterculture, and analyses of the Jesus Movement in North America. Together, these works provide crucial context for understanding why religious alternatives flourished among youth in British Columbia during the late 1960s and early 1970s.

Studies of NRMs often focus on belief, conversion, and social legitimacy, while countercultural histories emphasize politics, youth rebellion, and moral panic. Scholarship on NRMs has moved away from the pathologizing language of 'cult' toward contextual and sociological interpretations, as the word cult has "become little more than a label slapped on religious groups regarded as too exotic, marginal or dangerous,"⁹ and "has acquired such horrible connotations that it can scarcely be used as an objective social-scientific description."¹⁰ So, NRM scholarship was born from a deliberate effort to distance the study of these groups from the stigma and connotations associated with the word 'cult' and from the imprecise and misleading nature of the term.¹¹ Scholars emphasize the flourishing of modern NRMs as responses that were contingent on the social change, identity crises, and institutional decline of the 1960s and

⁹ Joseph P. Laycock, *New Religious Movements: The Basics* (Routledge, 2022), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003214212>, 3.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 13.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 5.

1970s.¹² Central themes in the literature include legitimacy of these movements, stigma, religious pluralism, and the relationship between irreligion and religious experimentation.

Joseph Laycock further expands on the basics of NRM scholarship, looking specifically at the United States. He situates it within the legacy of the cult scare of the 1970s and 1980s, when Western democracies like Canada and the U.S. hit a crisis point over the perceived threat that cults presented, which shaped both popular and academic understandings of minority religions.¹³ This crisis point was reached due to three factors; that many baby boomers spent their 20s trying new religions, that new missionizing religions from Asia were entering the U.S after changes to immigration law, and that discourse about ‘brainwashing’ became more mainstream as a product of the Korean War.¹⁴ An anti-cult movement therefore began as a response to cults, resulting in a ‘cult war’.¹⁵ Laycock’s work looks at the who, why, and how of conversion, determining that converts tend to be young, have more education than average, tend to be from middle and upper-middle class households, tend to be female, and that those with backgrounds as Baptists and those who practice Judaism are more likely to join a NRM.¹⁶

British Columbia stands out in NRM scholarship due to its long history of irreligion. Not only did it experience a postwar decline in religiosity, but the province had consistently lower levels of institutional affiliation compared to other provinces.¹⁷ This created space for alternative religious expressions. As Lynne Marks notes in her work on irreligion in settler era B.C.: “the popularity of both unbelief and alternative religions reinforces the legitimacy of a broader range

¹² E. Burke Rochford Jr, ‘The Sociology of New Religious Movements’, in *American Sociology of Religion*, vol. 13 (BRILL, 2007), 259-260.

¹³ Laycock, 9.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid., 10.

¹⁶ Ibid., 50–51.

¹⁷ Lynne Marks, *Infidels and the Damn Churches: Irreligion and Religion in Settler British Columbia* (UBC Press, 2017), <https://doi.org/10.59962/9780774833462>, 5; Tina Block, “‘MOST OF TODAY’S TEEN-AGERS LAUGH ABOUT GOD’: Youth, Secularization, and the Sixties in British Columbia”, *BC Studies* (Vancouver, Canada), no. 203 (Autumn 2019): 26.

of religious and irreligious choices than may be possible in more dominantly Christian regions.”¹⁸ Tina Block’s work on youth religious indifference found that many young people rejected churches not out of atheism, but because disengagement aligned with broader cultural expectations of rejecting authority and tradition;

The idea that it was natural for young people to rebel against institutional religion, especially during the sixties, recurs throughout the oral narratives. As one respondent matter-of-factly remarked about his rejection of organized religion: “as a teenager you learn to reject what your parents and the authorities around you have told you.”¹⁹

Religious indifference, rather than unbelief, became the socially acceptable stance for youth during the 1960s and 1970s.

Marks’ scholarship found that, in contrast to provinces where church affiliation remained a marker of respectability, B.C. developed a culture in which non-affiliation carried relatively little social stigma among male settlers and that many “found a unique freedom to be actively irreligious.”²⁰ When Christianity was no longer compulsory, it became one option among many, opening space for hybrid, experimental, and non-traditional forms of religiosity like Spirituality and Theosophy.²¹ These works establish the structural and cultural preconditions for irreligion and religious experimentation, but leave open questions about how specific groups mobilized these conditions in moments of moral panic and generational conflict. This gap makes Marks’ research particularly valuable as a foundation for studies that examine how irreligion intersected with youth alienation because it identifies the preconditions that made alternative movements both possible and appealing. It is also valuable for studying alternative Christian movements in

¹⁸ Marks, 187.

¹⁹ Block, 34.

²⁰ Marks, *Infidels and the Damn Churches*, 4.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 187.

urban settings such as Vancouver, as it explains how these groups gained traction there. Together, Block and Marks establish irreligion as a condition that encouraged religious experimentation in British Columbia.

Canadian countercultural historiography has focused primarily on youth rebellion, political activism, and state response. Central themes include moral panic, generational conflict, urban space, and social disorder. In the scholarship examined, religion was notably absent from much of it. Instead, counterculture is frequently framed as secular or anti-religious.

Michael Boudreau's work exemplifies this. He argues that the political and social tensions of the 1960s persisted into the early 1970s, as demonstrated by the 1971 Gastown Riot. The riot exposed a deep divide between young people seeking social change and older generations committed to maintaining order. Participation in counterculture frequently resulted in social condemnation by older generations, reinforcing youth alienation. Boudreau draws on mainstream and countercultural newspapers, city sub-committee reports, correspondence sent to the mayor of Vancouver, and popular magazines to illustrate how authorities understood and reacted to counterculture. While his work builds effectively on earlier scholarship, particularly that of Daniel Ross, it does not consider religious responses to these tensions, limiting its relevance for studies of religious movements.

Daniel Ross' analysis of Vancouver's counterculture is particularly influential due to his use and development of Stanley Cohen's original moral panic theory. Cohen's theory was that the development of a moral panic could be understood through a series of stages. First, a person, group, or behaviour is identified as a potential threat/as a target by moral entrepreneurs (a group of people or an organization that crusades to create or enforce new social norms and rules based on their own moral beliefs)²². This target is then defined as dangerous to societal values or

²² Howard S. Becker, *Outsiders: Studies in the Sociology of Deviance* (Free Press, 1973), 147-148.

interests. Mass media then broadcasts this threat to a wider audience, painting them as a ‘folk-devil’. They simplify the target into easily described features and stereotypes, exaggerate the issue through the distortion and fabrication of the story, and then predict further immoral actions by the folk devil.²³ These representations heighten public anxiety and generate moral outrage, leading to moral entrepreneurs intervening. Their intervention leads to policy development and social control as a method of combating the perceived threat. Then, when the panic fades, the stereotypes created during the panic often remain. Ross applies this theory to Vancouver hippies, discussing how media portrayals and political rhetoric framed them as threats to youth and social order, justifying increased policing and policy intervention. However, Ross believes that Vancouver’s situation was much more than a simple call to action or the most persistent factor affecting policy decisions.²⁴ His demographic and spatial analysis helps explain why counterculture became geographically and symbolically visible in Vancouver, explaining why Love Street became the hotspot for hippie communities. However, like Boudreau, Ross largely ignores the religious dimensions of counterculture.

Linda Mahood’s work expands on how transient youth became framed as a social problem during the 1960s and 1970s in Vancouver. She demonstrates that the conflict over youth hostels and hitchhiking was not just about public order. Instead, it was also about the deeper anxieties over mobility, morality, and generational change. By tracing the “Battle of Jericho” and the local opposition to federally funded hostels, she shows how municipal authorities and residents interpreted traveling youth as both disorderly and dangerous which transformed youth tourism into a political crisis.²⁵

²³ Stanley Cohen, *Folk Devils and Moral Panics: The Creation of the Mods and Rockers* (Basil Blackwell, 1990), 40; *Ibid.*, 31–33; *Ibid.*, 39.

²⁴ Ross, ‘Panic on Love Street’, 14.

²⁵ Linda Mahood, ‘Youth Hostels and Hostile Locals: Vancouver’s “Battle of Jericho,” 1970’, *Urban History Review* 48, no. 1 (2020): 44, <https://doi.org/10.3138/uhr.48.1.004>.

Work done by Tamara Myers and Georgia Twiss further expands upon Mahood's. Their work is additionally beneficial for contextualizing the social reform efforts around transient youth culture in the 1960s and 1970s and the emerging opinions that believed youth needed to be saved.²⁶ They examine how responses to these youth were shaped by older traditions in B.C. of child-saving and moral reform. Rather than seeing youth mobility as an expression of freedom, authorities increasingly interpreted it as a social problem that required intervention, "When it came to teen transience, stories of youth liberation quickly turned into cautionary tales at the hands of adults. Themes of individual escape and delinquency betrayed what the city's Children's Aid Society perceived as an 'everlooming problem—rebellious, rootless, and 'homeless' teenagers.'"²⁷ Their work further demonstrates how the beliefs that children needed to be saved blended with the need to control 'rowdy' teenagers, often using stories of vulnerable teenage girls that led to increased negative press coverage.²⁸ This work helps to contextualize groups like the JPA, whose outreach to hippies and transient youth echoed these assumptions of the necessity of saving kids, allowing them to gain support with older generations and other Christians.

Stuart Henderson's study of Yorkville contributes to this discussion by illustrating how sensationalized media coverage exaggerated drug problems and alienated youth from authorities. As access to formal support services became increasingly difficult, young people in Yorkville gravitated toward informal and volunteer-based networks. Although Henderson does not focus on religion directly, his analysis helps explain why alternative organizations were able to attract youth who felt abandoned by the state. American scholarship on the Jesus Movement further contextualizes these developments.

²⁶ Myers and Twiss, 'The Rising (Street) Generation', 161.

²⁷ Ibid., 162.

²⁸ Ibid., 163–64; Ibid., 174.

Scholarship on countercultural Christianity and the Jesus Movement begins to address the absence of research on the relationship between counterculture and religion by examining how religious groups engaged directly with youth culture. Bruce Douville's work on Toronto's Jesus Movement examines the relationships between hippies, religion, and politics during the 1960s and 1970s. He argues that Jesus People movements were rhetorically anti-institutional while still benefiting from institutional church support, with many of their members still attending established churches.²⁹ Rather than replacing churches, these movements functioned as intermediaries that reconnected youth with Christianity by offering a more unique religious experience. To the youth, "the Jesus People had an authenticity and vitality that were lacking in the established churches."³⁰ Douville further argues that Jesus People played a role in transforming "left-leaning hippies into social and political conservatives."³¹ His methodology, which centers on interviews, magazines, and newspapers, allows him to trace the growth and public perception of the movement. This approach is resonant of my own, as I focus on using published interviews of JPA members as well as stories in newspapers to establish a timeline of the JPA's operations.

Larry Eskridge situates the movement within broader patterns of experimentation, disillusionment, and institutionalization. He provides an overview that covers most of the time period of the Jesus Movement's existence in North America, detailing how it has changed over time. Eskridge emphasizes the role of drug culture in shaping countercultural identity and details how many hippies eventually turned toward more conventional religious expressions like the

²⁹ Bruce Douville, 'Countercultural Christianity: Negotiating Hip and Evangelical Identities in '70s Toronto' (Doctor of Philosophy, York University, 2011), https://www.academia.edu/901175/The_Uncomfortable_Pew_Christianity_the_New_Left_and_the_Hip_Counterculture_in_Toronto_1965_1975_Chapter_Nine, 442.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 443.

³¹ *Ibid.*

Jesus Movement.³² Over time, Jesus Movement organizations shifted from targeting drug-addicted counterculturalists to attracting younger, more middle-class participants.³³

Eskridge's broad, interview-based methodology works well to show this transition, though his work lacks perspective from those outside of the movement or from those against it.

Bruce Douville's work on the Jesus Movement is more valuable for analyzing the JPA in this thesis than that of Eskridge. Toronto was going through a similar situation to what can be seen in Vancouver. It was comparable in size and in the nature of urban politics. While the religious scenes were different (due to B.C.'s more secular nature), it is still comparable— B.C. still had many churches. In addition, Douville's work is focused on Canada, whereas Eskridge is focused on the U.S and the Jesus Movement's spread eastward to the Midwest. The religious differences between the U.S (especially the Midwest) and British Columbia are less comparable than the ones between British Columbia and Ontario. The JPA may have originated in the U.S, but they came into Canada, where they would have to adapt to the people of Vancouver's behaviours, expectations, and differences. Ultimately, while Douville's work is more applicable, Eskridge's is still valuable for contextualizing the JPA.

Despite the breadth of this literature, several gaps remain. Countercultural histories largely ignore religion, limiting their ability to explain why religious movements appealed to youth during periods of moral panic. Due to British Columbia's long history of secularization, the focus of studies on countercultural youth has not been religion. With many other aspects of counterculture in Vancouver to explore, it is less the fact that religion is being ignored but rather not prioritized by scholars. Even "the rich literature on secularization in Canada has focused less

³² Larry Eskridge, *God's Forever Family: The Jesus People Movement in America* (Oxford University Press, 2013), 147, <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195326451.001.0001>.

³³ *Ibid.*, 145.

on religious belief and more on the decline of religion in public life.”³⁴ Religion did not have a large role in social history during this period in British Columbia. That is why it has not been the focus of countercultural studies.

Another gap can be found in the scholarship surrounding NRMs. While this scholarship is attentive to belief and affiliation, it rarely engages with theories of social control or moral panic. Few studies examine how religious movements actively responded to the stigmatization and marginalization of countercultural youth, and the Jesus People’s Army in Vancouver has received little focused scholarly attention. This thesis addresses these gaps by examining how the JPA was able to take advantage of the moral panic and youth alienation happening in Vancouver. Drawing primarily on newspaper sources and applying Ross’s moral panic framework, this study integrates insights from NRM scholarship and countercultural history. By situating the JPA within British Columbia’s long history of irreligion and alternative religiosity, this research demonstrates how NRMs functioned not as anomalies, but as adaptive responses to social crisis, offering belonging, meaning, and moral order to youth marginalized by both church and society.

³⁴ Block, ‘MOST OF TODAY’S TEEN-AGERS LAUGH ABOUT GOD’, 25.

Methods and Sources

The majority of the sources used in this research were newspapers, including the JPA's newspaper known as *The Goad* and two of Vancouver's published newspapers (specifically *The Province*, *The Sun*), as well as *The Victoria Daily Times* (which became *The Victoria Times* in 1971)).

There are strengths and weaknesses to relying primarily on newspapers for evidence. The three city newspapers that I use allow me to gauge a general public opinion on the JPA, however these newspapers provide few opinions from those participating in counterculture who were not already expressly aligned with the JPA. Therefore, most of the articles put the JPA in a positive light, especially those from their own newspaper. As Laycock writes, "It is vitally important to consider the source when doing archival research. Few sources about NRMs are neutral. Literature produced by the NRM will naturally present the group and its leadership in the best possible light and should not be taken at face value."³⁵ Some anti-JPA sentiment is still recorded, mostly through the use of the negative term 'Jesus Freaks' by authors in mainstream papers. These city newspapers provide a variety of statements from those who have attended the meetings/have interacted with the JPA, commentary from members of the JPA, and interviews with the JPA's leader, Russell Griggs. In addition, the city newspapers are useful for constructing the timeline of JPA activity, though they only give a broad overview of it. This is supplemented with the two issues of *The Goad* that were available, issues number 3 and 5.

These newspapers do not provide exact numbers for attendance of JPA events, instead only providing broad ranges or numerically unclear statements. Moreover, I do not have definite

³⁵ Laycock, *New Religious Movements*, 29.

data of actual members converted, only the best estimate. While the exact numbers cannot be known, the JPA would have at least made contact with a large portion of Vancouver's hippies.

It is important that these newspapers are read with care. Bias is implicit in all of these sources— the larger city newspapers print what sells and the JPA prints what they believe will draw the most converts to their organization. This needs to be considered while looking at these sources.

The Jesus People's Army's Story

Chapter 1: Counterculture versus Vancouver

The countercultural movement in Vancouver began in the mid-1960s, when many youth began to concentrate in the neighbourhood of Kitsilano.³⁶ It was driven by the large population of baby boomers who were beginning to enter the workforce and higher educational institutions like the University of British Columbia. Their arrival in these areas challenged the established behavioural norms of the previous generations, as they “often had political agendas that were distinct from those of their elders.”³⁷ These political agendas were increasingly influenced by the Vietnam War and American media and ideas, as both US-based university activism and young American immigrants spread to Canada. Forty thousand young Americans immigrated to Vancouver with these new ideas around 1966 and 1967.³⁸ They formed the basis of counterculture activity in Vancouver as the Kitsilano neighbourhood became associated with “resistance to materialism, conformity, and straight authority with its large hippie population.”³⁹

Kitsilano property owners (including merchants and homeowners, who made up the Kitsilano Ratepayers' Association (KRA)) were not happy with the youths moving into the neighbourhood. They saw hippies as a problem, often complaining to the city of excessive noise and public urination.⁴⁰ They began to write to the city government en masse between 1967-68 expressing their issues with hippies. They eventually formed an Action Committee with the

³⁶ Ross, ‘Panic on Love Street’, 11-12.

³⁷ John Douglas Belshaw, ‘The 1960s Counterculture’, in *Canadian History: Post-Confederation* (BCcampus, 2016), <https://opentextbc.ca/postconfederation/>.

³⁸ Jake Noah Sherman, “‘They Are a Scum Community Who Have Organized.’” *The Georgia Straight, Freedom of Expression, and Tom Campbell’s War on the Counterculture, 1967 – 1972* (Masters Thesis for the Master of Arts, University of Victoria, Department of History, 2018).

³⁹ Myers and Twiss, ‘The Rising (Street) Generation’, 163.

⁴⁰ Sherman, ‘They Are a Scum Community Who Have Organized’, 21.

intent of lobbying the city government to intervene and prevent the city from ‘deteriorating’ further.⁴¹ Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) undercover operations were used to record hippies with officers being taught “to pay particular attention to general appearance, health and sanitation, attitudes towards education, politics, religion, family, and sex.”⁴² A moral panic began to form around hippies and their behaviour, which mainly latched on to hippies’ illicit drug use, though apparent “idleness” and sexual immorality were also concerns.

As the moral panic intensified, municipal authorities increasingly treated hippies as a public order problem. The idea that hippies were corrupting children (especially underage girls) was a rampant one, with little grounds in reality.⁴³ Police surveillance and enforcement efforts were expanded, with officers beginning to crack down on Love Street in 1967.⁴⁴ Mayor Campbell defended the increase in arrests for loitering in a 1968 interview with CBC, calling hippies “parasites on the community,” and arguing that “these people do not deserve any support” and that it should go to the ‘good youth’.⁴⁵ Such statements framed countercultural young people as both morally inferior and socially unworthy, legitimizing aggressive policing and exclusionary policies.

The hostility towards hippies was reinforced through newspapers and popular media, which increasingly portrayed hippies as dirty, drug-addicted, and dangerous, “The media aided this campaign by making the long-haired hippie the face of immorality, emphasizing especially injuries, damage, or deaths associated with recreational drug use.”⁴⁶ Rising tensions culminated in open conflicts between youth and authorities (such as during the Gastown Riot, where police

⁴¹ Ross, ‘Panic on Love Street’, 18-19.

⁴² Brody Herman, “‘We Were Not Playing Games’: Transnational Moral Policing in 1970s Vancouver’ (Master of Arts, Simon Fraser University, 2021), <https://summit.sfu.ca/item/34819>, 15.

⁴³ Ross, ‘Panic on Love Street’, 21.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 12.

⁴⁵ ‘Vancouver Politicians Averse to Hippies’, *CBC*, 1968, 406.8, <https://www.cbc.ca/player/play/video/1.3593591>.

⁴⁶ Herman, ‘We Were Not Playing Games’, 17.

used force to disperse large crowds of hippies and other demonstrators). Yet, the city believed that these hippies could be changed– and that only then would they deserve the city’s support. Press coverage around the turn of the decade frequently suggested the possibility of youth ‘going straight’.⁴⁷

Vancouver rejected hippies, isolating them and defining them as a problem that needed to be handled for the sake of the community. Many businesses refused to serve hippies, often treating them poorly. Members of the community would spit on them.⁴⁸ Hippie businesses and rental accommodations were targeted more often for fire, health, and safety inspections.⁴⁹ In this climate of hostility and rejection, countercultural youth were pushed to the sides of urban life and denied belonging. It was within this environment that organizations such as the JPA became attractive.

⁴⁷ Ross, ‘Panic on Love Street’, 24.

⁴⁸ ‘Vancouver Politicians Averse to Hippies’.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

Chapter 2: Services of the Jesus People's Army

The JPA offered multiple different services that were appealing to youth. They can be organized into three major categories. First, the JPA promoted a form of Christianity that was more enticing to youth than traditional churches, as it was more emotionally engaging and culturally relevant. It was a form of community which many had been deprived of, aggravated by the city's hostile treatment of countercultural youth. Second, for both those interested in religion and those who were not, the JPA provided practical support. They offered employment opportunities as well as free food and board. Third, the JPA provided drug detoxing services to those struggling with addiction. Together, these elements addressed the spiritual, material, and personal crises faced by many countercultural youth.

Despite knowing what the JPA used to recruit youth, it is difficult to ascertain what the member count of the JPA was at any given time— there is nothing recorded about how membership fluctuated or a total of how many members were successfully recruited. There are simply no records for it, and different newspapers offer conflicting numbers of attendees in the few services that the media attended.

The JPA offered a 'fun and exciting' take on typical church services, which enticed youth to join. Some of their recruits already had backgrounds in religion as well and the fresh take on Christianity drew in many others, particularly those wanting to get away from the regulated version provided by the churches of Vancouver. In an interview published in *The Sun* in their January 8th, 1972 issue, the JPA leader Russell Griggs, as an ordained minister and a holder of a BA in comparative religions,⁵⁰ says that he believes that the formalism of rituals and rules in

⁵⁰ Lisa Hobbs, 'B.C. Pays Jesus Army Grant', *The Sun*, 8 January 1972.

standard Christian churches has depersonalized the religion and “taken away from” it.⁵¹ The JPA thus aimed to address that problem by combining aspects of popular culture with religion. This resulted in dynamic meetings that involved rock music and hymns from their band and testimonials without being ‘churchy’, with the media once reporting on one of these performances at the JPA’s first meeting;

A folksinger “turned on” the crowd with the JPA theme [song], *Coming to Your Town, Spreading Jesus All around*. His performance was punctuated with “amens”.

“This is a song the Lord laid on me a couple of months ago,” he said. “How many religious fanatics are out there?” he asked— and 400 hands swayed in reply.⁵²

This less-regulated, emotionally expressive, ‘fun and exciting’ take on typical church services convinced some youth to convert.

A fraction of those who joined the JPA, such as Dick Palumbo and Florent Clemont, had religious backgrounds, though the proportion of these youths versus non-religious ones is unknown. While B.C. has a long history of secularization, it is important to reiterate that not every youth in Vancouver during this period had been raised in B.C. Many had come from the more religious United States. Those who were raised with a religious background often had left the Church after moving out of their parents’ homes. In this way, the JPA functioned as a way to reconnect with faith outside of parental authority and denominational control. Faith was reintroduced in a form that felt voluntary, emotional, and socially meaningful. As Clemont recounts;

I attended Catholic schools till grade 12. We attended church (my mother, 2 sisters, and myself) but jumped at any excuse to miss Mass [...] I went into the meeting that evening and was surprised to see a group of people, composed of both young and olds, straight and hip, all singing and having a good time together worshipping the Lord Jesus; they

⁵¹ Hobbs, ‘B.C. Pays Jesus Army Grant’.

⁵² Lorne, ‘Jesus Army Invades City’; Hunter “Soldiers’ of Jesus Army suffer border casualties’.

had vibes that were so true and beautiful that I knew immediately that this was the answer that I had been searching for.⁵³

Despite his disagreements with the formalist practices of the Vancouver churches, Griggs maintained a good relationship with them. The JPA were invited to speak at many of them according to the fifth issue of *The Goad*. They were also invited to speak in high schools, extending their outreach beyond street populations and into formal educational settings, although the number of youths recruited through this avenue is unknown. These connections helped legitimize the JPA's activities and allowed the movement to present itself as an extension of Christian outreach rather than a radical departure from it, "We want to help you and yours. If you don't tell your children about Jesus, who will?"⁵⁴

The JPA presented itself as intimate and emotionally open, promising not just belief but belonging. As such, the JPA solidified its appeal by acting as a community that combined countercultural elements with Christianity. The broader hostility that hippies encountered in Vancouver served to enhance the appeal of community. Police harassment, loitering laws, and pressure to 'move on' reinforced the sense that they were unwelcome in the city. For youths already estranged from their families, this environment deepened feelings of isolation and instability. In a testimonial published in *The Goad*, issue five, Caroline Sims relays the following about Vancouver and about the JPA;

And I got to Vancouver but couldn't figure out where I belonged. I was really lost. I couldn't find anyone to love, I couldn't find happiness or anything at all. And I thought my last chance would be a commune in the mountains [...] but when I got there, it was just the same as everywhere else. They still gossiped, they still talked against each other [...] nobody loved each other and no one cared about anyone else.

⁵³ The Jesus' People Army, 'Thank You Jesus - My Life Is Changed!', *The Goad*, Mid-January, 5.

⁵⁴ The Jesus' People Army, 'If You Need Help: What We Are Doing in Your Town...', *The Goad*, Mid-January, 7.

And I was walking down the street one morning and I didn't know where I was going [...] two brothers came up and walked behind me and asked me if I wanted to go to church. I sort of laughed and said no. Then they read me a scripture [...] I knew these guys had something, because one was so happy and the other was so peaceful. Those two boys had something I wanted.⁵⁵

Another similar story was shared by a young woman named Terry Scott, who had previously been involved in Christianity and frequently cycled through periods of attendance. She recounts how she had originally stopped participating in religion due to the lack of Christian young people in her town. She says the following about the meeting she attended;

In late August the Jesus People's Army arrived in Canada for meetings at Pender, and some of the JPA girls stayed at [the transient summer hostel we were staying at]. I heard Linda Meissner was speaking, and I had known her from Phoenix, so I wanted to hear her. I went the first night I had off.

As I was sitting in the meeting, all the experiences, all the love I had known with the Lord, started coming back. I remembered how beautiful our relationship had been, how beautiful it was to walk with Him. I couldn't wait for the altar call. They were singing "When the Saints Go Marching In," and Oh, how I wanted to be in that number! I started crying, and told the Lord how much I missed Him, how sorry I was I had left Him, and how much I wanted Him back. And I didn't feel anything. But I walked by faith that whole week. And a week later I got the feeling.⁵⁶

In this context, the JPA's promise of acceptance and care offered not only meaning that many hippies felt they lacked but also a refuge in a community that *wanted* them there.

Some youths sought out the JPA for other reasons. Griggs noted that many under-18s had come to the coffeehouse for aid, as it was one of the places where it was available.⁵⁷ Griggs, in an earlier interview with *The Province* that was published September 3rd, 1970, emphasized that the goal of the JPA was to "help people at the practical level" by feeding, sheltering, and sharing

⁵⁵ The Jesus' People Army, 'Thank You Jesus - My Life Is Changed!', *The Goad*, Mid-January, 5.

⁵⁶ The Jesus' People Army, 'And They Became One', *The Goad*, Mid-November.

⁵⁷ Hobbs, 'B.C. Pays Jesus Army Grant'.

with them.⁵⁸ The JPA also emphasized that it invested in people rather than property, a principle highlighted in *The Sun*'s January 8th, 1972 issue. At a time when youth unemployment was increasing (jumping from 1969 to 1970 from 10.9% to 15.5% for ages 14-19 and 6.7% to 11.0% for ages 20-24, compared to the national unemployment rate of 4.7% in 1969 and 5.9% in 1970), the JPA's offering of employment at their coffeeshop, in their print shop, and at their farm outside of Chilliwack was especially attractive to youths who needed money.⁵⁹ In addition, youth hostels were being shut down by the government, with fourteen of the previous summer's twenty closing in 1971.⁶⁰ The JPA's operation of their "crashpad" (a place meant for short-term stays), separate homes for men and women, and hostels gave young people a place to stay when options were limited.

The JPA's free housing became especially important in the 1970s as many city officials and moral entrepreneurs began to take issue with Vancouver's hostels, all of which had thus far been opened at the federal government's discretion, not the municipality. A sticking point for many was that these hostels were run by hippies.⁶¹ Mayor Campbell believed that they were "a rallying point for radicals and [encouraged] sexual misbehavior" and "would attract more "drifters, bums, and freeloaders" to the neighborhood."⁶² Vancouver's government began to shut down as many of these youth hostels as they could in 1971, leading to a series of conflicts that culminated in an event known as the "Battle of Jericho", where hostellers and police clashed violently in early October of that year. It was covered widely by the media, including an article

⁵⁸ Aileen Campbell, 'B.C. Platoon Joins Jesus People's Army', *The Province* (Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada), 3 September 1970.

⁵⁹ Canada Committee on Youth, *It's Your Turn...*, with David Hunter and Canada Department of the Secretary of State (Information Canada, 1971).

⁶⁰ Maurice Bridge, 'Armories Definitely "out" as Hostels for Transients', *The Province* (Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada), 26 June 1971.

⁶¹ Mahood, 'Youth Hostels and Hostile Locals', 47.

⁶² *Ibid.*

published in *The Sun* after the battle was over, and garnered a large crowd.⁶³ Many protestors showed up in support of the hostellers, including the JPA.⁶⁴ By attending this protest, not only were they able to build/strengthen relationships with hippies, but they also showed the hippies that the JPA cared about their situation and wanted to support them, building a rapport.

After receiving news that there were not enough available beds due to the closure of fourteen hostels, the JPA saw an opportunity to support the community. They opened their own hostel in the summer of 1971.⁶⁵ The JPA's hostel was one of four additional hostels that opened in out-of-session schools. The others were run by two churches and the YMCA.⁶⁶ Through its operation, transient youths were exposed to the JPA (although the number of people who stayed there is not available). It created regular opportunities for contact with people who were already in a vulnerable and transitional stage of their lives. By interacting with those arriving in and departing from Vancouver, JPA members were able to engage directly with young travelers, offer them a sense of stability and community, and introduce them to the organization's beliefs and activities. This setting gave the JPA repeated chances to build relationships and trust with newcomers, increasing the likelihood that some would remain with the organization rather than continuing on to the next city.

While housing was a pillar of the JPA's appeal, one of their most appealing programs was their drug detoxification effort. While the method of detoxification has not been recorded, their newspaper frequently refer to saving people from drugs. Many testimonials from new converts are published in *The Goad* about how the JPA saved them and changed their lives; a regularity in evangelical services going back to the 19th century and remaining a large part of the American

⁶³ Fred Cawsey, 'From Idle Jeering to Sharp Violence', *The Sun* (Vancouver, Canada, Canada), 16 October 1970.

⁶⁴ Mahood, 'Youth Hostels and Hostile Locals', 53.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 47; Bridge, 'Armories Definitely "out" as Hostels for Transients'.

⁶⁶ Bridge, 'Armories Definitely "out" as Hostels for Transients'.

Jesus Movement's youth culture.⁶⁷ These testimonies were also a part of the weekly meetings as public demonstrations of how Jesus heals addiction, with about one testimonial every four songs (if patterns remained similar to the few meetings that the media attended, though the amount that they did attend is difficult to determine).⁶⁸ One such testimony came from a man named Tiny, who detailed how he had been an “atheist, criminal, soldier, wife-beater, dope pusher, drunkard, and biker before he was saved by Jesus,” which encouraged many others to reply to him with support for God.⁶⁹

Similar testimonials were available in local newspapers, with some being recorded directly from the meetings. In *The Province's* September 3rd, 1970 issue, several new converts discuss their backgrounds and the reasons for why they joined the JPA. The vast majority of these converts had been young drug users, as the JPA specifically targeted this group for recruitment, with Jim Palosaari saying in that same interview that “[the JPA] aims to lead troubled street youth from drugs and alcohol to Christianity.”⁷⁰ An unnamed 23-year old declared that there was no way he would go back to drugs, while Florent Clermont, a born Roman Catholic, explained that after being baptized by the JPA at one of their public baptisms, he and his wife now had a strength in them that would keep drugs away. These testimonies acted as evidence of the JPA's effectiveness to readers, presenting religious conversion as a decisive break from addiction. They reinforce the idea that spiritual commitment would replace dependence on drugs.

⁶⁷ George A. Rawlyk, *Ravished by the Spirit: Religious Revivals, Baptists, and Henry Alline*, 1st ed., The 1983 Hayward Lectures (McGill-Queen's University Press, 1984), <https://doi.org/10.1515/9780773561014>, 111; Eskridge, ‘The Jesus Kids: The Jesus People Movement Becomes Evangelical Youth Culture, 1971–1974’ in *God's Forever Family*.

⁶⁸ Lorne, ‘Jesus Army Invades City’.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Campbell, ‘B.C. Platoon Joins Jesus People's Army’.

The JPA's stance on drugs was complex. Officially, they declared drugs as a problem that messed up young lives, twisted values, glorified anger, and cheapened love.⁷¹ However, their publicized interactions with members showed an acceptance, at least partially, of their use, as it was the way for God to “[use] what Satan [had] innovated to reach the people.”⁷² In their response to someone’s questions on hallucinogenics and religion (which was published in the 3rd issue of *The Goad*) they discuss how hallucinatory drugs can bring people to God, “in that they promote a realization that there's got to be more. They allow God to bring us to a place of desperation for something worth really believing in.”⁷³ By responding in this way and sharing specific testimonials, the JPA reframed psychedelic experiences as an incomplete search for transcendence that only Christianity could truly satisfy. Florent Clemont discusses in his interview how a bad experience on drugs is what led him to joining the JPA, believing it to be divine intervention;

Then I feel my mind expanding; I'm going to melt in the universe losing my identity. I'm trying to hold my mind together but every word I hear takes an infinity of meanings. There's no way to hold communication with my wife anymore. Then I knew everything was over and I cried out "I don't know why I'm here. I know I'm a sinner but all I want is Jesus Christ. I believe only in Him." Then a cutting voice like none other said: ‘He needs divine grace.’

After that, all negative spirits disappeared and I came down slowly getting back my breath of life and I know what the gift of life is. I would live without anything as I lived. I felt like the caravan robber in the desert who left all his gold and possessions and everything in the sand behind in desperate need of water, grabbing onto life. Jesus gave me the water of eternal life.⁷⁴

The loneliness/emptiness that youth like Caroline Sims, Dick Palumbo, and Connie Rempel describe in interviews and letters published in *The Goad* became something that could only be

⁷¹ The Jesus’ People Army, ‘Editorial’, *The Goad*, Mid-January.

⁷² Pat Moan, “‘Jesus Freaks’ Scout Vancouver’, *The Sun* (Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada), 20 August 1970.

⁷³ The Jesus’ People Army, ‘Letters to Those Jesus People’, *The Goad*, Mid-November.

⁷⁴ The Jesus’ People Army, ‘Thank You Jesus - My Life Is Changed!’, *The Goad*, Mid-November.

quelled by the worship of Jesus. To further complicate the JPA's stance, they do not quite employ scare tactics. Instead, in their fifth issue, they provide a table of details about a variety of drugs that could be found in Vancouver during the period, baldly describing what they are, what the slang names are, the main effects of the drugs, and the possible dangers associated with them. This table seemed to aim to dissuade drug use through education, instead of simply acting as a scare tactic.

	Marijuana	Hallucinogens	Amphetamines	Barbiturates	Cocaine	Heroin/Morphine
What They Are	Marijuana is the dried flowering tops and leaves of the Cannabis sativa, commonly called hemp. It looks like fine, green tobacco and smells like alfalfa. It is usually smoked, but can be baked into cookies, fudge or mixed with honey for drinking.	LSD, Mescaline and psilocybin occur in a natural state but are also illegally manufactured. Other chemicals being made include dimethyltryptamine, tetrahydrocannabinol, phenylcyclohexylpiperidine and dimethoxymethylphenethylamine.	Amphetamines and methamphetamines are legally made and prescribed to curb appetites, relieve minor depression and increase energy. They are central nervous system stimulants. Some methedrine is manufactured illegally.	Barbiturates are sedatives prescribed to induce sleep and for their calming effect. Both psychological and physical dependence can develop with heavy use, particularly when abusers inject the chemicals intravenously.	Cocaine is extracted from the coca bush and is a white, odorless, fluffy powder looking somewhat like crystalline snow. It is eaten, sniffed or injected, often with heroin, but is not physically addicting.	Morphine is derived from opium, and heroin is produced from morphine. Both are usually seen as a white, snowy powder which can be taken several ways but are usually injected. Narcotic addiction usually refers to these two drugs.
Slang Names	Joints, sticks, reefers, pot, hay, Mary Jane, Acapulco gold and Lotion green (in South Vietnam).	Acid (for LSD), DET, DMT, THC, DOM, PCP (or "Peace pills") and STP (Serenity, tranquility and peace)	Ups, pep pills, bennies, capitol, footballs, hearts and, for methedrine, meth and speed.	Red birds, yellow jackets, downers or downers, blue heavens and goofballs.	Coke, leaf and snow Speedballs when mixed with heroin	'M' and dreamer for morphine, 'H,' snow, junk, horse and nod for heroin, smack when mixed with marijuana.
Main Effects	Feelings of great perceptiveness and relaxed pleasure often accompany small doses. Erratic behavior, loss of memory and distortion of time, space, color and sounds follow bigger doses.	All produce varying degrees of illusions, delusions and hallucinations. They can lead to severe mental changes like those found in psychotics, and to depression and sometimes suicide.	Normal doses produce an increased alertness but very heavy use, particularly of injected methedrine, tends to produce vast overconfidence, hallucinations and aggressive acts.	Small amounts make the user relaxed and often sociable and good-humored. Belligerence and depression are frequent with major use, often similar to drunkenness.	Oral use can cut fatigue and produce some exhilaration. Intravenously, it can induce dangerous overconfidence, hallucinations and paranoid tendencies.	The two are generally sedative or calming and are effective pain killers. They slow pulse and respiration. Heroin is faster and shorter acting.
Possible Dangers	The risk depends on the personality of the user, strength of the drug and pattern of use. Distortion of space and time make the user accident prone. Psychological dependence is fairly common.	Permanent brain damage is suspected but unproved. Any can trigger psychotic episodes which may recur months later. LSD can break chromosomes — a potential for birth defects.	High blood pressure, irregular heart rhythms and heart attacks can result, as well as violent behavior. High tolerance and psychological dependence are rapid, but no true physical addiction.	Sedation, coma or death from respiratory failure can follow intentional or accidental overdoses. The user forgets how much he has taken. Alcohol and barbiturates together are deadly.	Convulsions and death can occur from overdoses but are not common. Paranoid activity is common, however, and very strong psychological dependencies can develop.	Users are prone to respiratory failure until tolerance develops. Overdose deaths are fairly common because the drug compound can contain more pure heroin than the user expects or is able to tolerate.

Figure 1. The table of drug information, published in *The Goad*, Issue no.5

This raises the question of funding. Without it, the JPA would not have been able to function as an organization and offer the services that they did. While some of their funds came from the operation of their coffeehouse and bakery, the majority of them came from donations and grants, especially when the JPA was establishing itself in Vancouver in 1970. One of the

most contentious grants they received was the Gaglardi Grant, which equaled \$1200.00CAD monthly (equivalent to approximately \$9800.00CAD per month in 2026). This grant was originally given to the JPA for their drug detoxification efforts.

The Gaglardi Grant was established by Philip Arthur Gaglardi. On October 27th, 1969, Gaglardi assumed the portfolio of Minister of Social Welfare. During his term as minister, the name of his position changed to the Minister of Rehabilitation and Social Improvement. He was a frequent supporter of funding organizations to help addicts because, as he said in the February 13th, 1970 Legislative Session;

It is useless for the Government to be giving money to a man that is an alcoholic or a dope addict — that is of no consequence to him — in fact, that is aiding and abetting his habit. What we are interested in doing is helping out these half-way houses, A.A's, different organizations that can rehabilitate those particular individuals in that category.⁷⁵

In September of that same year, the JPA began to receive the grant and Gaglardi's support.

Gaglardi further tells *The Sun* that “if [the JPA] can motivate a fellow to get off drugs, off LSD and the other things these people stand for, if they can motivate him to become morally straightened out, then I'm all for it.”⁷⁶

There were conditions for this grant, as discussed in *The Sun's* January 8th, 1972 article. The grant was originally meant to be awarded on the basis that the “teenagers [received] an education through correspondence courses.”⁷⁷ An interview with Dr. W. Robb of the department of education in Victoria published in the same article reported that while Griggs had intentions to set up such a program, it had not been finalized. In that same issue, Griggs admits that these courses never got started and they were instead receiving the money for helping youth that had no other opportunities for aid. Griggs, while discussing his arrangement with the government,

⁷⁵ Hansard, ‘1970 Legislative Session: 1st Session, 29th Parliament’, 13 February 1970, https://www.leg.bc.ca/hansard-content/Debates/29th1st/29p_01s_700213p.htm.

⁷⁶ Moan, ‘Jesus Army Goes East for Converts’.

⁷⁷ Hobbs, ‘B.C. pays Jesus Army grant’.

points out that “because of their youth, a large number of under-18’s weren’t being helped. We have an open coffee shop and kids come in with their problems. We did not have the facilities to help them. The government gives us \$3.50 a day for young people so they have a place to stay, food, and lodging.”⁷⁸ The JPA still continued to receive this grant until they were absorbed into the Children of God. It was crucial for the operation of their organization and to continue to support the youth that came to them.

The JPA also received support from members of the community. Palosaari cited in an interview that the main source of their funds were donated by “concerned Christians tired of the staid traditional church”. When they first began, Griggs joked that “whenever we need money it just walks in the door. People come in and turn over their pay cheques so everyone can eat. A man walked in yesterday and gave me \$300 because he said we were doing such a good thing.”⁷⁹ Even some of the houses that they used were donated and their printing equipment was on loan to them by a member of the community.⁸⁰

⁷⁸ Hobbs, ‘B.C. Pays Jesus Army Grant’, 2.

⁷⁹ Moan, ‘Jesus Army Goes East for Converts’.

⁸⁰ Hobbs, ‘B.C. pays Jesus Army grant’.

Chapter 3: Seeking Youth

The JPA did not solely rely on the services they offered to attract youth. They also promoted themselves through highly visible public activities that gained media attention, such as through their participation in events like Vancouver's annual Polar Swim, Easter Sunday celebrations in Stanley Park, and the staging of public baptisms in English Bay. These all became a form of spectacle that could be easily observed by passersby and reported by the press.⁸¹



Figure 2. An image of a public baptism held by the JPA, published in the September 12th, 1970 issue of *The Vancouver Sun*.

The JPA also took a very active approach to recruitment. It was common for them to be out in the streets, on the beaches, and in parks recruiting people, as was noted by *The Sun*.⁸² On

⁸¹ Martha Robinson, 'Jesus People Turned off Drugs, on to Christ', *The Sun* (Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada), 12 September 1970.

⁸² Moan, 'Jesus Army Goes East for Converts'.

Easter Sunday of 1971, *The Province* notes how the JPA stood underneath a makeshift wooden cross and offered literature to those who passed by.⁸³ Street witnessing, the act of sharing their gospel in public spaces by speaking one-on-one with passersby, formed an important part of how the JPA advertised themselves. Recruitment was embedded into everyday routines instead of just treated as a secondary activity, with converts often remaining out until the evening spreading the gospel in the streets of Vancouver with bibles in hand.⁸⁴

The personal newspaper of the JPA also played a significant role in advertising the organization's activities and values. It was distributed directly on the streets during witnessing and outreach, functioning both as an invitation to participate and as promotion. One letter published in *The Goad's* fifth issue recounts how its writer was approached by a JPA member while the member was witnessing on the street and was convinced to buy a copy of their newspaper. However, not all counterculturists were appreciative of the JPA. In one encounter, a seller for the Georgia Straight, a notable countercultural newspaper, meets whom he calls a "Jesus Freak";

The young man with the wispy beard stands right in front of me so I can see no one but him and no one can see me. He carries a Bible and a stack of newspapers the same size as mine, and I am afraid he is going to try to sell me a newspaper.

[...] "Have you accepted Christ as your personal saviour?" "Yes." (I'm an atheist.) I try to sell around him again, but to no avail. Vancouver has just barely begun to accept the Straight sellers, but it is still a little wary of the "Jesus Freaks" and stays away from them.

"I'd like to give you one of our newspapers." He stuffs a copy of the Jesus Peoples Army Newspaper, *The Goad*, under my arm. I blanch, as only a newspaper seller can when he has just been sold another newspaper.

"But I can't pay you for it-"

⁸³ "'Be-in' Becomes 'Mud-In'", *The Province* (Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada), 12 April 1971.

⁸⁴ The Jesus' People Army, 'News of The Jesus People', *The Goad*, Mid-November, 5.

"That's all right, brother.. Jesus is free, don't you know that by now?" And with a smile he walks away. Nice guy. Nice people. The beautiful innocence of the saved.⁸⁵

Despite not always having success, the JPA was able to pass their message directly into the hands of the people who passed by on the street.

Geography further contributed to the attention that the JPA received and the number of youth they could reach. In the few years that they were in Vancouver, the JPA could be found at numerous locations– though some were just temporary. Two permanent locations were frequently advertised to the press and in *The Goad*. One was their coffeehouse, The Shepherd's Call, which could be found at 1655 West Broadway Ave, and the other was their bakery, Barry's, which could be found at 2977 Granville St. Both of these locations were in close proximity to Love Street and the largest concentration of apartments in Kitsilano, as well as the Cool-Aid House, one of the few other places of board for transient youths. This close proximity to Love Street provided a lot of exposure and interaction with the public, especially from their target groups.

⁸⁵ Stephen Allen, 'Standing on the Corner... Watching All the Weirdos Go By', *The Province* (Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada), 27 February 1971. For more on the Georgia Straight, please refer to Jake Sherman's 'They are a Scum Community Who Have Organized'.

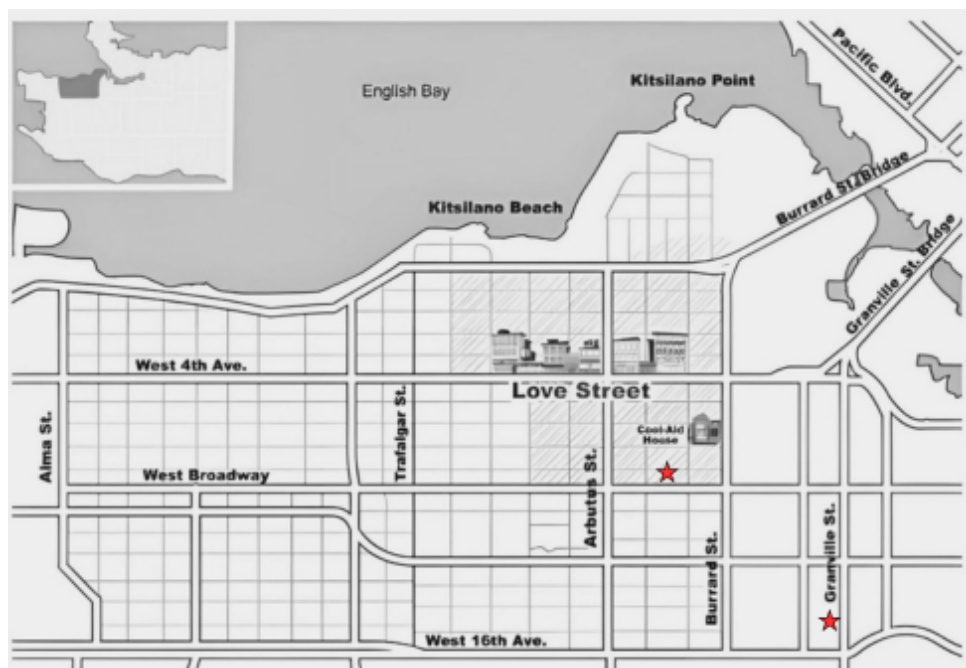


Figure 3. A map of the Kitsilano neighbourhood by Steve Ashley, published in Daniel Ross' *Panic on Love Street*. It includes my own additions of the JPA coffeehouse and bakery locations, marked with the red stars. The shaded squares are areas with the highest concentration of apartments.

The Goad's fifth issue makes reference to the fact that the JPA's coffeehouse was popular on the weekends, specifically stating that on each of those days, it was 'fullhouse' and the festivities often did not end until 3AM, despite only being open for a few weeks prior to the publishing of that newspaper issue. One explanation for the popularity could be because the JPA did not charge cover for their events nor did they charge for their food, claiming that they were different from other coffeehouses in Vancouver in that way.⁸⁶ They aimed to create a space for community, writing that "outsiders [were] welcome to come in and share musically or just find out what Jesus is doing with young people all over."⁸⁷ Eskridge concurs that this was something seen frequently across the Jesus Movement;

⁸⁶ The Jesus' People Army, 'If You Need Help: What We Are Doing in Your Town...', *The Goad*, Mid-January, 7.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

[Coffeehouses served] as places to meet informally with fellow believers, places to make inquiring friends and acquaintances, places to find acceptable Christian entertainment, and staging points for activity and assistance to Jesus People in nearby communities. For most kids who identified with the Jesus People, there was a coffeehouse (often coffeehouses) that played an important role in their involvement with the movement.⁸⁸

Unlike other late-night activities, there was no drugs or alcohol, giving people the opportunity to meet and engage with each other in places other than a party. This combination of free access, late-night activity and entertainment, and proximity to countercultural neighborhoods allowed the JPA to function as both a social hub and a religious site.

All together, these strategies show that the JPA was not passively waiting for youth to seek them out but actively inserting themselves into the cultural and physical spaces of Vancouver's countercultural scene. Through public spectacles like the mass baptisms, street witnessing, print media, and strategically located spaces where youth could seek aid, the JPA made conversion highly visible and participation easy.

⁸⁸ Eskridge, *God's Forever Family*, 165.

Conclusion

This thesis has demonstrated that the JPA acted as a response to the social, political, and cultural conditions that were shaping youth life during the late 1960s and early 1970s. The appeal of the JPA rested not only in its religious message but in its ability to address the alienation of youth produced by moral panic, generational conflict, and hostile institutions. By offering a less rigid form of Christianity alongside services such as housing, food, employment, and drug detoxification, the JPA was able to position itself in Vancouver to fill the gap between formal religious institutions and youth attracted to counterculture. Its success shows how NRMs can thrive in moments of social crisis.

Vancouver's countercultural youth were shaped by rapid demographic change, rising visibility as they began to enter the workforce and higher education, and growing hostility from municipal authorities and the press. Hippies and other transient youth concentrated in the neighbourhood of Kitsilano and quickly became symbolic targets in a broader moral panic that framed them as threats to public order, morality, and civic stability. Through police surveillance, harsh punishments for crimes like loitering, and sensationalized media portrayals, they were cast as socially deviant and thus undeserving of support. The resulting exclusion pushed them to the margins of society, making alternative support services a necessity rather than just attractive. The JPA emerged in this context as one of the few organizations willing to accept and assist these youths. Many joined because they wanted to be accepted and because they wanted to be in a community.

The JPA's religious appeal rested in its departure from traditional church structures that many young people associated with authority, hypocrisy, and emotional detachment.⁸⁹ By

⁸⁹ The Jesus' People Army, 'Thank You Jesus - My Life Is Changed!', *The Goad*, Mid-November, 7.

combining rock music, informal testimony, and communal worship, the JPA presented Christianity as emotionally expressive. It was not mediated through the same rigid denominational structure that caused many youths who had a background in religion to leave them. There was no parental authority. It was simply voluntary faith and setting their own personal commitments to the JPA. For those youths who left religion, the JPA offered a way to reconnect. For those who did not have experience in religion, it presented Christianity as an alternative to drugs and loneliness. It presented it as a community.

Material support was equally central to the JPA's attraction. As youth unemployment rose and hostels were closed by municipal authorities, many young people faced immediate threats to their survival. The JPA's provision of food, housing, and work opportunities addressed these crises directly. Its coffeehouse, bakery, print shop, farm, and crashpad created a network of spaces where youth could find both economic and social stability. In a city where official services were either insufficient or withdrawn, the JPA positioned itself as a functional substitute for these lacking government services. Their drug detoxification services illustrates how the JPA reached out to youths to 'save' them. Addiction was framed not simply as a social problem but as a spiritual crisis that could be resolved through conversion and community. Testimonies found in both mainstream newspapers and *The Goad* presented drug use as an incomplete search for transcendence, suggesting that psychedelics and narcotics revealed a desire for meaning that only Christianity could fully satisfy. This reframing allowed the JPA to engage directly with countercultural practices without wholly condemning them. Rather than employing fear-based tactics, the movement used education and personal narrative to discourage drug use.

The JPA's recruitment strategies further reveal its adaptability. The movement was not passive and instead embedded itself within the cultural and physical spaces of youth life. Public

baptisms, street witnessing, coffeehouse gatherings, and participation in protests transformed religious practice into public spectacle. These activities ensured that conversion was visible, normalized, and accessible. The strategic placement of JPA facilities near Love Street and other countercultural hubs maximized interaction with its target population, while its newspaper functioned as both advertisement and ideological tool. By distributing *The Goad* directly in public spaces, the JPA merged evangelism with everyday encounters, turning casual interaction into potential recruitment.

The JPA's presence in Vancouver, however brief it may have been, highlights the larger understanding that periods of social instability generate repression and protest but also produce new forms of connection and development of meaning (in that the JPA succeeded in showing that Christianity could be reimagined as countercultural rather than conservative, communal rather institutional, and practical rather than abstract). Despite their successes, the JPA was not a longstanding movement in Vancouver. As with all evangelical movements, some members 'backslide', leaving the JPA and returning to their previous lives. Backsliding has been a problem for evangelicals since the inception of this religious movement, going back to the 18th century.⁹⁰

In the summer of 1971, Russell Griggs and his wife travelled to Los Angeles to make contact with the infamous Children of God (CoG). The CoG were another evangelical organization, however they were considered to be much more cult-like by the people of the time. Griggs had concerns with the quality of work the JPA was doing, as he found that many youth, even after conversion, were returning to drugs.⁹¹ He wanted to team up with the CoG while still remaining an independent, autonomous organization. This did not occur– the CoG absorbed most

⁹⁰ George A. Rawlyk, *Ravished by the Spirit: Religious Revivals, Baptists, and Henry Alline*, 1st ed., The 1983 Hayward Lectures (McGill-Queen's University Press, 1984), <https://doi.org/10.1515/9780773561014>, 63.

⁹¹ Hobbs, 'B.C. Pays Jesus Army Grant', 2.

of the JPA and the ensuing fight over the Gaglardi grant gained attention in the newspapers.⁹² The JPA's relationship with the CoG would be a great topic for further research, as their dynamics could be contrasted with the JPA's.

Ultimately, the case of the JPA shows how new religious movements can flourish because of moral panics. As countercultural youth were cast as problems to be solved, organizations that claimed to have the power to 'save' them gained moral and financial legitimacy. The JPA capitalized on this dynamic by presenting itself as a solution to drug addiction, homelessness, and disorder— all of which directly aligned its mission with the broader anxieties about youth.

⁹² Hobbs, 'Teen Menace Feared', *The Sun* (Vancouver, Canada, Canada), 7 January 1972.

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