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Freedom to Laugh

Rev. George Twigg-Porter, S.J.

A LAUGH

It is a wonderful thing to live in America where one is free to laugh. A person like myself who was not always a citizen can appreciate our rights better; just as a convert to the Church, like myself, can appreciate the gift of Faith perhaps a bit better than one born in the Faith. One of the glorious rights we have as free people is the right to be different, the right to laugh at and with other people. I wonder how many Communists really laugh?

Someone once said that we ridicule or fear the unknown. Ridicule comes from those who do not understand or who do not wish to understand something that is either beyond them or different from them, but something which will not be harmful to them. Anxiety dwells in the hearts of those who are fearful of a noise, a disturbance, a philosophy which might possibly cause harm. In a democracy there is ample room for ridicule, for fear, for bias and bigotry, for prejudice, and for laughter; in a dictatorship there is room only for fear.

(Father Twigg-Porter is Chaplain, San Francisco Emergency Hospitals Staff)

We are free to laugh in America. Laughter can well accompany the antics of the bizzare, the *Avante-garde*, the beatniks, hippies, and their ilk. We are free to laugh at pacifists and Birchers, politicians and crusaders. The "Hippies" are funny, some are tragic, but all invoke a smile or a laugh, a tear or a frown from an American who is free to laugh or cry or shout. Some who are laughed at resent this same freedom to laugh given to others. Just as the Communists are wily in their skillful use of the U.S. Constitution as a cloak for their malice; they would deny ultimately those same principles to promote the cause of world revolution.

"HIPPIES - A LAUGHING MATTER

The "Hippies" of Haight-Ashbury - they don't like the name "Haight" for a street - seem to resent those who laugh at them, but yet seek bizzare, laughter-provoking publicity. They are bellicose pacifists. In America, and by the American form of democracy they are free to promote their philosophy of LOVE. They are also free to push aside the hair from their eyes and find their way to the relief office to obtain their welfare check. It is not a crime to go un-washed or unshaved; nor is it a crime to laugh at them.

Sometimes the laugh will be Pagliacci-like with tears and smiles intermingled because of the tragi-comedy aspect of the "Hippies" lives. We can't really laugh at an LSD user or dealer, or heroin pusher; we can pity. We can't really laugh at a free-love devotee, especially when this philosophy is focused on emotionally disturbed minors and run-aways. We can't really laugh at dirt and filth in the dwellings of slums wherever they are to be found; it is hard to laugh at lice in the hair, venereal disease, hepatitis, parasitic use of welfare funds, the unwed mother with her illegitimate child. A Mephistopheles-like laugh could be given.

NO LAUGHING MATTER

Yet we can laugh at the apparent apathy of public officials and the press who neglect their duty to protect free citizens from the contamination of disease and social degradation. We can laugh at ourselves when we behave like awestruck children at the zoo, watching the antics of monkeys. We can give a big smile to the press and to those who buy the publicized "happenings" of the far-out and the far-in. And we are free to do this, just as the so-called "victims" are free to express their opinions against our laughing. The "Hippies" wish to make love, not war; they wish to love; but can true love be expressed without a pleasant smile, or an occasional round of deep laughter? We can laugh at, applaud, approve, or condemn the "Hippie" or so-called "Freak-out" psychedelic philosophy; but there is left only a moronic laugh for the legacy and the by-products which the

"Hippies" bring to us of poverty, disease, irresponsibility, apathy.

LAUGHTER IS BOONE

In our nation there must be room for laughter. Recently, this was brought out beautifully by Pat Boone who performed at the Nugget Casino in Reno-Sparks. (Don't ask me what I was doing there. You wouldn't believe me. Would you believe that I was there for a medical convention? Well, Pat Boone sang his wonderful song about a letter from a soldier in Vietnam to his buddy who wanted to "make love; not war." He then told us that we live in a great country where we can laugh at and with our neighbors and our neighbor is likewise free to yell at us of join in with us.

There is nothing more contagious than a laugh and I would like to see the so-called "Hippies" laugh more often; it may relieve them from taking their trips to escape reality and responsibility. You see, the Love philosophy they preach seems a very one-sided love: we must love them so much that we give them anything their little hearts (or heads) desire: free lodging, money, free food, and a good status in society. Is this really a laughing matter: I am sure that some of the "Hippies" themselves are laughing at such a nation and at such a people who allow them in the name of freedom to restrict the rights of others through sit-ins, mill-ins, sleep-ins, and other "happenings." It is a funny world indeed, but isn't it a wonderful world where we can love and laugh and live together.