

Variations on a familiar symbol

VERMEULEN STREET, Friday.

THE would-be non-conformist young think they are being very individual, even revolutionary, by sporting long hair, beards, untidy, even ragged, clothes, and wearing either a peace sign or a cross on a chain round their necks. The length of hair, the beard or moustache are fashions that come and go, and by conforming to the popular style of the moment, the young simply prove that they go along with the rest. They are all too ready to wear badges.

What fascinates me is the prevalence of the cross, or even the Crucifix, as the popular, trendy decoration. There's nothing against it, of course, and it is — in all its many fascinating variations — extremely decorative. But one wonders how many of its wearers concern themselves at all with its significance.

Let it be admitted, a



good many of the young from all corners of the globe are taking active part in a search for peace, love and a sense of commitment. Do you know, for instance, about the Council of Youth at Taizé, a beautiful spot in France?

More than 100 countries were represented at the opening Council of Youth, with tens of thousands housed in tents on the fields from August 30 to September 1. The celebrations of the opening were held in six enormous circus tents, grouped like the petals of a flower.

Involvement

It might have been a tremendous rock festival, but instead the celebrations underlined in many different ways the fundamental aim of this gathering of youth: a unity between struggle and contemplation and a loving involvement with others.

The idea of those active in the movement is that nothing can be demanded of others except from those themselves prepared to stake everything. The idea is to face and accept a challenge — and youth wants challenge — to form a sharing community, poor, but creating peace. In fact, this was a festival of liberation.

Caux

Now don't switch off if I cross the border from France to Switzerland. Twelve young South Africans — both Blacks and Whites — from various South African universities attended the Moral Re-Armament conference at Caux. They made a tremendous impression, according to one of the leading Caux personalities who has just returned to work in South Africa.

This is Henry MacNicol, who tells me it is his fifth visit here, and he plans to make it an indefinite one. He was one of the organisers, you may remember, of the MRA World Conference in Pretoria last Easter.

Says Mr MacNicol:

"When the 12 young South Africans arrived the whole assembly greeted them with Swiss yodels and in various other traditional ways. The South Africans were obviously moved. As one of them said to me later: 'Everywhere I go, we have to defend South Africa. Here you have made us welcome without reservation.'"



Typical of searching youth is this student who attended the recent conference at Caux in Switzerland.