

Editorial Features

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What Matters in Kansas

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New Christianity Is Here

EDITOR'S NOTE — The author of the 16th in The Eagle and Beacon's series of guest articles is the Rev. Bill Reece, pastor of Pine Valley Christian Church in Wichita. Pine Valley Christian is an experimental church, and the Rev. Mr. Reece has been its first and only pastor over its existence of four and one-half years. In the accompanying article he explains the new concepts of Christianity that have come to be called The Revolutionary Church. Mr. Reece was born and reared in Oklahoma. He studied at Central State College and Phillips University in Enid, from which he holds his A.B. degree. His doctor of divinity degree is from the Graduate Seminary at Enid.

By BILL REECE

A new breed of Christians is rising up in our time to become a revolutionary church. They are men and women who are sensitive to the new kind of world we live in which calls for a new kind of church. They are those who are perfectly clear about the sickness of the church, but are no longer content to complain, to criticize or to belittle. Instead, they have decided to be the new church.

Everyone knows of the sickness of the church. The basic symptom of its sickness is its irrelevancy to the new world. There is no solution to the church's problem, unless Christians understand the radical transposition that has taken place in 20th century civilization.

Mankind is in the midst of a cultural revolution. It is bringing an alteration in human life through the scientific revolution. The urban-technological revolution, and the shift in human moods which may be called the religious revolution, or the secular revolution, depending on how one looks at it.

THIS NEW WORLD emerging from these revolutions is characterized by a radical shift in mind set from rural to urban. In the past life had a slow beat. Today, the beat of life is fast and accelerating. The rural concept of neighborliness was face to face. In urban society the only way to be a neighbor is to change the structures of justice that minister to the well being of all people. Often people don't know their next door neighbor, but that's not crucial. The important thing is to offer him a new deal.

The revolutionary church knows the kind of world in which it exists. It not only affirms that world, but sees itself as leaders of the revolution that is producing a new world in which every man can begin to realize his human possibilities.

HOW IS THE NEW church coming to be? Whenever a radical metamorphosis takes place either in an individual or a group, it is because there has been a radical alteration in the functional image out of which that individual or group lives its daily life. The church now has a drastically functional image of itself.



The Rev. Bill Reece

understood that though the church is never without specific historical manifestations, it is never synonymous with any historical manifestation. Those manifestations and images must change according to the need of the historical situation that is taking place in our time.

The old image of the church served well in the world now past, but it became perverted when the church tried to function out of it in a new world. As a result the church became protector of the status quo and began to turn in on itself.

This loss of a sense of outgoing destiny took the form of becoming defenders of doctrine. It became bogged down in institutionalism because its structures no longer served the world. Finally, the church withdrew from the world by seeking "togetherness". People thought that the way to handle the insecurity of a transitional age was to huddle together in mutual appreciation societies.

THE CHURCH NOW HAS A new functional image relevant to today's world. The image is Mission. That does not mean that the church has a mission. That was the old image of the church. The church was in one place and the mission was in another. They were two separate entities. The new image is that the Church Is Mission. That can be understood in terms of the Apollo flights to the moon. Those astronauts in that space craft don't have a mission. They are the earth's mission to the moon. This is the kind of image out of which the church must operate now.

What does it mean to be the Church as Mission? First, the new churchmen see themselves as the bearers of the Good

They have received the Good News that life is not to be found in the future or in some other set of circumstances, but in the present reality. They have been grasped by the proclamation of Christ that the gift of life is good, that they are totally accepted, that their past is forgiven and the future is open in a thousand different ways. They operate out of that self-awareness and thus become the Good News.

Second, the new churchmen see themselves as a revolutionary people. They understand the way history is changed. They know that history moves along in a certain direction and periodically an elite group of people emerges from the main stream with a vision of the future. They are not elite because they have more money, or because they have a better education or anything else except for one thing—they have decided that they are going to be the ones to shape the future of the world. Then they create new symbols that can communicate to the masses the new possibilities for life. When that is done, history takes a new direction.

THIS CAN BE SEEN in the life of someone like Rosa Parks who one day decided that she was not going to move to the back of the bus as black people were supposed to do. She became a symbol to black people everywhere. As this vision of what life could be was communicated to the masses, the course of history was totally changed. The new church has an image of itself as being revolutionary in that sense.

Third, the new churchmen see themselves as those who have decided to create the future. They are aware that many of the old images of life are no longer relevant, but neither have the new ones appeared. They see that their task is to create the new structures and images which will make it possible for people to realize their human potential.

FINALLY, THOSE PEOPLE are those who have decided to do this job on behalf of all mankind. That means they create the future on behalf of all who now live on the face of the earth. Their lives are to be expended for every brown man, every yellow man, every black man, and every white man in every place. Their work is also on behalf of all who have ever lived. They know themselves to be continuing the work of Christ, of Paul, of St. Francis, of Martin Luther King. Their lives are invested on behalf of all who will live in the future. It is for every unborn child in every time and place. They know that being mission demands all that they are, but that nothing less than that is worth the gift of their lives.

No one knows precisely what form the new church will take. It will no doubt have many forms because of our pluralistic society and the constantly changing situation. But whatever its practical outward guise, it will be a new breed of Christians who live out of the image that as the loved ones, the forgiven ones, the accepted ones, they are set free to risk their lives to create