

A WORKING PAPER for those who decide to take the revolutionary character of our age seriously.

A MODEL FOR  
REVOLUTIONARY MISSION

Prepared by

The National Conference of the Methodist Student Movement

The Ecumenical Institute

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## I. HISTORICAL CIRCUMSTANCES

We live in a moment in history when radically new possibilities are opening before us - possibilities for freedom or bondage, creation or destruction - and the power is within our hands to decide which direction the history of civilization will take. This power to decide is the sign of what it means to be alive today.

As all men before us, we live within a particular period in history. Ours is the last half of the 20th century. As much as we may wish for the security of another era, we cannot have it. Our situation in the 20th century is a new one and must be accepted for what it is.

Change has taken many faces. Due to our technological accomplishments we have shifted from a rural culture to a massive urban society. This move from a small, parochial mentality has made necessary a radical adjustment of our social, political, and economic life. Lucid men are conscious of these radical adjustments and have risen up to demand that these changes be directed to occasion the humanization of man and not his dehumanization. People who make such demands are the revolutionaries who stand at the cutting edge of human existence and who, by their revolutionary stance, intend to affirm that existence.

In our urban culture there are many power structures. These can be very dehumanizing, but the revolutionary demands that they be forged in such a way as to release possibilities of unforeseen freedom.

Change is manifest in the revolutions which have erupted in every corner of the world. New nations are being born. Imperialism is seen for what it is and its roots are being ripped out. Oppressive political and economic structures are being uprooted and replaced by new structures.

For the first time man requires universality for his frame of reference. No longer is he allowed to be parochial, seeing only his own self, his own neighborhood, his own nation, or even his own culture. A radical interdependence of the peoples of the world is our situation. The decision of one person, one nation, one culture affects that of every other person, nation, and culture. This places upon us a tremendous burden of responsibility for each decision that we make.

Our world is restless. The revolutionary winds that are blowing across her face stir up a mood of freedom and responsibility that we must eagerly affirm. Unlimited possibilities of space exploration and the pervasive relativism of the post-Einsteinian era have shown man that his future has not yet been determined. He has been shown that he is not a victim of historical forces, but that he is now free to choose the role he will play in the drama of history. He knows that every act of injustice and inhumanity presents new possibilities and imperatives for freedom, reconciliation, and restoration. He trembles in his unprecedented freedom and its great responsibility, yet courageous affirms that it is precisely this gift which thrusts him into his full humanity.

## II. HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Our lives have been saturated with this new mood whether we have been conscious of it or not. The church has been called by her Lord to signal and to respond to this new mood.

The Christ event shattered the first century mindset and gave history a new Word-the Gospel. This good news announced that man no longer was bound to the simple obedience of servant to master. We have become sons, and not only sons, but heirs (Galatians 4:1-7). Now we have the awesome responsibility of administrating the affairs of the world in the name of God. We are free men in Christ bound only by gratitude for this new life.

This Word has existed throughout history, but not always has it been recognized for what it is. The medieval church attempted to objectify it into its institutional forms and

practices, but the Word defies any such manipulation. As a result, the Word was not recognized as good news for man, and the stage was set for the Reformation.

The "conquests" of new lands by western explorers and the expansion of western empires around the world was accompanied by a shifting of cultural, economic, and political centers. The Newtonian revolution in science also gave the world a radical new perspective and set the stage for the economic and political revolutions of the 18th and 19th centuries.

World War I and the theological revolution initiated by Karl Barth thrust man into the 20th century. Bultmann, Bonhoeffer, Tillich, the Niebuhrs, and others have joined Barth in the recovery of the Word for 20th century man; and we as the Methodist Student Movement have tried to appropriate the ancient but ever-new Word into our life. We have struggled with what it means to be the church in mission to identify with and participate in the activity of the Word in the revolutions of our time. We believe that this Word seeks to restore community and humanity to its fullness, and therefore we have a history of involvement on the frontiers of social change.

### III. THE NEW REVOLUTIONARY STANCE

Given this cultural and historical perspective, we are first led to a statement of being; a picture of what characterizes the revolutionary in the twentieth century.

The revolutionary steps into the midst of society, actively participating in those institutions and events which forge our common history. He knows that unless he is present in the midst of the world he cannot understand it nor can he reform it.

The revolutionary is continually sensitive to the "ongoingness" of the world. He is present in the name of Christ, often anonymously. He is aware of the environment of the moment, tuning in before speaking and acting.

While the revolutionary, by definition, responds to the situation of the moment by specific acts, he also accepts full responsibility for his activity. His decision to act grows out of the carefully considered tension between obedience and freedom. He recognizes the need for compliance with the immediate social order as it is given to him while he considers ways to respond creatively to fresh demands for justice and community. As Bonhoeffer says, "Obedience without freedom is slavery; freedom without obedience is arbitrary self-will."

The revolutionary realizes that his life is inextricably involved with the lives of every human being. He affirms that he, as every man, is made out of the stuff of the past; his life is now bound to the destiny of all men, and his actions affect the entire future of civilization. The revolutionary decides, as the man for others, to take upon himself representational responsibility. That is, he assumes responsibility for all men's lives. He responds to God on behalf of the whole society, leading them into the fullness of existence manifest in Jesus Christ.

Secondly, we are led to a statement of intention, a picture of what the revolutionary does. There is no choice but for the revolutionary to be on the cutting edge of history. His decision enables the carving out of history from the variety of possibilities that come before him out of his circumstances. Essential to this task is the creation of a model of the future which is a basis for him to enter the social, political, and economical orders at the breach between the no longer and the not yet of history. He intends to alter the course of history by casting his life on the barbed wire of bondage so that history can climb over into a new future. More particularly, he is involved in the Viet Nams, the Selmas, and the Cubas of his day, and assumes full responsibility for the totality of these situations. He is accountable for the academic community's being visionary and competent in its preparation of the cosmopol-

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itan man, and for the religious establishment's moving out of its institution to meet its Lord in the midst of social, political, and economic upheaval.

#### IV. CALL TO INVOLVEMENT

Life has no relevance, no significance, unless we make a determined response to the new world mood, to the call to be human. As the National Conference of the MSM we have decided to offer our only life as our act in the creation of the new civilization. We will direct the force of our own lives into the stream of the revolution and lead it into the new humanity. We have decided to enter history as a decisive agent for renewal. Therefore, we invite all who wish to take the revolutionary character of our age seriously to unite with us in the creation of a new world.

The task of compiling the concerns of the 1965 National Conference of the MSM was difficult. The lack of time and specificity were two hindrances. This report is submitted in the recognition that it is not a blue print, but areas of concentration in which our creative thinking must be brought to bear. The responsibility rests with us to specify and expand on the model in each of our own situations. It will be done only by those who have decided to take the revolutionary stance in life.

## INTERNATIONAL

The imperative to deal with the world revolution in terms of structures of justice necessitates learning how to deal with power structures. We are babies in this area and need to delve deeply here.

Priority: Southern Africa... in recognition of the gross dehumanization of the peoples of Southern Africa, the students of the MSM intend these strategic imperatives.

- A. Through participation in conferences and seminars and individual study to become sensitively aware and critically informed concerning the peoples and problems of southern Africa including the following:
  - 1. The refugee situation
  - 2. African movement for self determination
  - 3. White Government policy
  - 4. Effects of and reasons for the U.S. foreign, political, and economic policies in southern Africa
- B. To initiate and/or participate in supportive action for the peoples of Southern Africa through dialogue and letters, sit-ins and demonstrations, lobbying and fund raising and work camps and summer projects. The dominant imperative placed upon us is that of influencing American foreign policy in southern Africa.

## NATIONAL

It is our imperative to work for a racially inclusive society, to combat poverty, and to foster community self-awareness. Concerning the racial issue our efforts should include:

- A. Plans to further use the MSM field team
- B. Becoming involved in national, state and local issues and organizations such as SCLC, NSM, SNCC
- C. Working to organize and carry out summer service projects which work on the frontiers of the areas concerned.
- D. Exerting efforts to purge our church structures of all racism.

In the sphere of combating poverty we need to sponsor poverty seminars in the academic communities and to be involved in the local programs carried on through the war on poverty and othersuch agencies. In the community we must work to eliminate the provincialism so prevalent in our society.

## THE UNIVERSITY

In light of the need to develop a radical new understanding of the role of the university in the world and because of the fact that we can affirm the possibilities for humanness within the university, we see the following as potential areas of concentration for bringing these things about.

### A. Breaking racial and economic discrimination

1. Admission procedures
2. Housing - on and off campus
3. Recruitment of minority group students - recognizing that a less than inclusive education is parochial
  - a. establishing scholarship funds
  - b. college exchanges

### B. Discovery of a new understanding of the role of the university

1. Not presupposing this role we urge people to develop a means of calling the university and the societies image of the university into question and examining it in light of the urban culture. (e.g. the parental image) This might be done in terms of meeting with legislators, administration, boards of regents, faculty and students.
2. Recognizing also the givenness of the university we urge people to explore the ways in which the "cruciform principle" is elaborated in the university and lift these up to the world.

## CHURCH RENEWAL

In understanding mission today the Church must be oriented to the future, realizing that the radical formation of urban culture is as much an attitude as a physical reality. The urban revolution demands that modern man be lucid and sensitive to the new possibilities implicit in such a reality. With this in mind, the MSM calls on those who are willing to step out on the edges of life and commit themselves to the following strategy and tactics for the renewal of the church.

1. Worship must become a living drama in which man recollects who he is to be in the midst of history and we must work to enrich our understanding and practice of worship.
2. Our structures must become those which catapult us into that creative tension between freedom and obedience. In our own situations this could very well mean student representation on conference boards and organized support of our campus ministers who risk their livelihood in an effort to be present and active in the world.



3. Our theology must not only bring us to the present but project us into the future. In order to understand this contextually, we must be consciously open to new insights and depths in drama art, literature as well as contemporary thrology.
4. Our mission must be in behalf of all of mankind including that part of the church which has not met the imperatives of our time. Several possibilities for revitalization are:
  - a. training the troops by changing the structures of our own state conferences.
  - b. States might also consider a travel team that would visit the campuses to meet with students in order that the parochial images of the world might be cracked.

#### THE DISCIPLINE

That eahh national council person remain in contact with 4 state presidents in his area to the end of sharing and calling one another into question as strategy is developed on state and national levels. We would request that the first letters be exchanged before winter council meeting in December and that the council members initiate the correspondence.