

## THE NEW REBELLION

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For the first three hundred years after Jesus left the planet, the vast majority of Christians were pacifists, dedicating themselves to non-violence as they believed it was modeled for them by Christ. Justin Martyr wrote in 109AD, "We, who had been filled with war and mutual slaughter and every wickedness, have each one—all the world over—changed the instruments of war, the swords into ploughs and the spears into farming instruments, and we cultivate piety, righteousness, love for men, faith, (and) the hope which is from the Father Himself through the Crucified One." Church father Tertullian argued that because Jesus took the sword from Peter's hand in the garden of Gethsemane, the sword has been taken from every Christ-follower's hand for all time and in all places.

The early Christians were then at odds with the Roman government they were commanded to submit to (Romans 13). Not only would Christians refuse to fight Roman wars but they proclaimed their citizenship to be in heaven and not on earth (Philippians 3:21) and asserted that their King, and not Caesar, was the only one capable of bringing salvation to earth (Acts 4:12) - not just salvation of the soul, but the rescue of all things (Colossians 1:20).

Despite their persecution by the Romans, these early Christians worked to bring salvation to their friends and enemies. They sold their possessions and gave to the poor so that no one had need (Acts 4). They took in the ashamed and hungry and disregarded, the orphans and widows (James 1:27). Until...

Until a man named Constantine ascended the throne of Rome just after 300 AD. The number of Christians in his empire had grown so rapidly that he feared, if not befriended, the Christ followers would one day take over the culture. So Constantine "converted" to Christianity while continuing to serve as the high priest of the national pagan religion. He made persecuting Christians illegal, made them equals with the Romans, and bought the allegiance of the Church.

In exchange for his protection, Christians began, more and more in every generation, to fight his battles and turn over the task of mercy-showing to his politicians. A church structure was formed in time, modeled after the structures of the Roman government. One man and his generation changed the theology, mission and methods and the Church.

It's happening again. There's a new rebellion underway. Rock stars like Bono and Derek Webb. Pastors like Rick Warren and Bill Hybels. Authors like Shane

Claiborne. Magazines like Relevant and Worship Leader. They're all ascending the throne of discourse within the Western Church. They're speaking to the growing number of young Christians weary of being persecuted by materialism, entertainment and apathy. They know there's another way to follow Jesus - they sense something greater is out there for them.

I think they hear the voices of their ancestors calling them back to a more radical, peaceful and merciful Jesus like the One followed in the first Century. They're beginning to revolt against institutional church, against a church that spends its money and time and talent on vertical experiences and not the horizontal salvation of all things, that makes teaching and music part of the core curriculum and benevolence an elective for the advanced.

The questions you now have to ask yourself, Leader, are many. Are the discontent young masses in your church right? Is there something ancient and more we've forgotten to be as the Church? What is that? And is that something you want to become?

If this young generation's inspirers are right in wanting to see more peace and mercy and action from the Western Church, how can you help them build that kind of Church? Why wouldn't you?

Prayer:

God, please give us the ability to sort through modern trends and culture and see the wisdom and value in the ancient and impractical. Teach us what is essential and what is not from all times, all traditions and all places. And give us words and lives that pass these essentials on to the next generation. Teach Your leaders through those they lead and teach the old through the young. We're listening. Amen.