

# Houses that change the world

*Towards a Re-Incarnation of Church*

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## Comments:

*A far more significant book than I expected. It challenges many sacred cows, demonstrates remarkable biblical, theological and strategic insight. The whole church needs to hear what Wolfgang Simson has to say in this seminal work."*

Prof. Kenneth B. Mulholland, Dean,  
Colombia Biblical Seminary

*A very important emphasis in ecclesiology, which I believe the Lord is impressing on His church in these days. A remarkable job."*

Ernie Addicot, Interdev, UK

*"I just kept finding myself saying: That's what I believe!"*

Daniel A. Brown, Sen. Pastor, The  
Coastlands Aptos Foursquare Church,  
USA

*"I read the first pages of the book and my heart was beating so fast I think I am getting tachycardia."*

Dr. Dan Trotter, Editor "New Reformation Review" and Ass. Prof. of Business Administration, Hartsville, USA

*"This is pure Gold!"*

Robert Fitts, Author of *The Church in The House*, Hawaii

*"A monumental and marvelous piece of work! It is going to be a very important contribution to the present situation faced by the church."*

Ralph Neighbour, Author of "Where do we go from Here"

*"Really superb, excellent stuff! This book has a phenomenal amount of truth, and has a lot to contribute into the debate concerning the shapes and models of church for the future."*

Roger Ellis, Revelation Church,  
Chichester/UK

*"I have actually read this book from cover to cover, something which I haven't done with any Christian book in years except Philipp Yanceys "What's so amazing about Grace".*

Chris Schneider, Servants/Onesimus,  
Philippines

*"Great Book! I was a Pastor in the Reformed Church in Switzerland for six years, and can agree with a lot from my own experience."*

Matthias Schuurmann, Theol. Teacher,  
Windhoek, Namibia

*An excellent book, which goes to the heart of the structure problem in our perception of the church. I completely agree with the analysis and much appreciate the book and its message."*

Patrick Johnstone, WEC, London

*"How this book echoes in my heart!"*

Tony Black, Reconciliation International,  
Scotland

*"Very challenging and extremely important."*

Kai S. Scheunemann, Reformer in  
Wiesbaden, Germany

*"Hits on a very significant topic sure to be a vital element in the explosion of the church around the world. Tremendous amount of great material. The vision and scholarship of this book is surely the wave of the future. This book is on the cutting edge of things to come. There is no question that if we are going to fill the earth with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord with millions of new congregations, we will have to return to the New Testament model presented here."*

James Montgomery, Founder and President, Dawn Ministries, Colorado Springs, USA

*The Carmelites have always known that a group of more than 20 people cannot have real fellowship. You can avoid each other too easily. If church wants to survive, she needs new and effective Forms. That is what housechurches can provide."*

Jakobus Richter, Mühlrad, Germany

*"MOST interesting and very revolutionary VERY worth reading."*

Magde S. Bowes, Editor, *The Believer*, Vancouver, Canada

*"A unique study, carefully studying New Testament examples of church-planting."*

Wes Wilson, Vice President, Every Home for Christ, Colorado Springs, USA

*"Inspiring! Forced me to rethink some of my convictions."*

Michael Strub, Mission Leader, Asia

*"Ground-breaking! So new and fresh, that, to the average reader, it will be quite revolutionary."*

Clive W. Clayton, Brussels, Belgian Evangelical Mission

*"I was thoroughly gripped by this book, so much that I read it right through."*

Nic Harding, Senior Church leader, Liverpool, UK

*"A very good and highly relevant book, excellent work. Written in a challenging style and spirit, but still remains balanced and mature."*

Berthold Becker, Intercessors for Germany

*"Very interesting reading. God is doing something incredibly significant across the world - that's why in a way, this book comes as no big surprise"*

Andrew Parham, Leadership Team, Ichthus Fellowship, London/UK

*"Enjoyed this book heartily. Forthright and passionate, but does not out down those coming from a different position. The analysis between the difference between cell church and house church is the best that I have read."*

Dr. Robert Banks, Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, USA

*"Housechurches seem to be tailor-made for today's Generation-X".*

Ulrich Salvisberg, Former Pastor and Coordinator, Explo 97

*"Prophetically shocking! An incredible amount of work, hitting on many of the crucial issues facing the Church today. A very challenging and stimulating book."*

Robert Mountford, City Vision, UK

*"Totally agree with the assessment of the Constantine Church. What also strikes me as absolutely right is the issue of the church having to become more persecution proof. This is the absolute opposite of the state church that gives you security as long as you are obedient."*

Björn Larsson, Priest, Church of Sweden

*"Wow! This book challenges our understanding of church and how it's done. I strongly recommend this book to every pastor and church leader."*

Eddie Smith, Coordinator, US-Prayer Track, AD2000 & Beyond Movement

*This is one of the most significant books that I have seen for a long time."*

Peter Brierly, Christian Research, UK

*"This book is prophetic and may be too early for many people. It is a must for those involved in leadership, and highly recommended for those involved in frontier missions."*

Maarten Bruynes, Leader of FMC, YWAM Holland

*"I am very sure this book will be of great service to the expansion of God's kingdom."*

David Lim, Manila,

*"To be honest, I have given up on all those new church fads and Christian waves. But this thing about housechurches excites me deep down. I have hoped for this type of church to become a reality all my Christian life. I can't believe it might come true! I am so excited I could cry."*

Computer Programmer, Switzerland

*"This might actually work!"*

Pharmacist, Switzerland

*"Something simple, yet dynamic.*

*That is what I have always hoped the church to be."*

Medical Doctor, Switzerland

*"I have been 40 years in ministry. Now, after finding out about housechurches, I feel I have climbed the ladder, only to realize that it has been leaning against the wrong wall."*

Mission leader, India

*"This is exactly the type of church I have seen in action, and what the Holy Spirit has revealed to us, before the missionaries came."*

Woman, Mongolia  
Philippines

*I was blessed, blessed, edified and excited, as I read this book. It truly grasps the radical essence of New Testament Christianity."*

Pastor Barry Kirk, Tilehurst Free Church (Baptist), Reading/UK

## **A vision too good to be true?**

*Being brought up in "Christian" Germany with churches everywhere, I have always felt that there must be something exciting about the Church which Jesus started and about which I read in the New Testament - but somehow I have yet to discover what it is. I dreamed - together with many friends and colleagues, of a church, that is as simple as One-Two-Three, yet is dynamic; an explosive thing, able to turn the world and a neighborhood upside down. The church as a supernatural invention; endowed with God's gift of immortality; the way to disciple each other, and to transfer the life of Jesus to each other. An experience of grace and grapes, love and laughter, joy and jellybeans, forgiveness and fun, power and - yes, why not, paper. A church, which does not need much finances, rhetoric, control and manipulation, which can do without powerful and charismatic heroes, which is non-religious at heart, which can thrill people to the core, make them loose their head for joy, and simply teach us The Way to live. The church which not only has a message, but is the message; which spreads like an unstoppable virus, infects whatever it touches, and ultimately covers the Earth with the glory and knowledge of God. It's power stems from it's inventor, who has equipped it with the most genius spiritual genetical code - a sort of heavenly DNA, which allows it to transfer and reproduce Kingdom values from Heaven to Earth, and transform not only water into wine, but atheists into fascinated apostles, policewomen into prophetesses, terrorists into teachers, plumbers into pastors, and dignified village elders into beaming evangelists in the process. It is like a spiritual family - organic, not organized, relational, not formal; it has a persecution-proof structure, matures under tears, multiplies under pressure, grows under the carpet, flourishes in the desert, sees in the dark, and thrives on chaos. A church that can multiply like two fish and five breads in the Hands of Jesus, were the fathers turn their hearts to the sons and the sons their hearts to the fathers, were it's people are it's resources, and which has only one name to brag about, the Lamb of God.*

**G**od is changing the Church, and that, in turn, will change the world. Millions of Christians around the world are aware of an imminent reformation of global proportions. They say, in effect: *"Church as we know it is preventing Church as God wants it."* A growing number of them are surprisingly hearing God say the very same things. There is a collective new awareness of age-old revelations, a corporate spiritual echo. In the following "15 Theses" I will summarize a part of this, and I am convinced that it reflects a part of what the Spirit of God is saying to the Church today. For some, it might be the proverbial fist-sized cloud on Elijah's sky. Others already feel the pouring rain.

## ***Fifteen Theses towards a Re-Incarnation of Church***

### ***1. Church is a Way of Life, not a series of religious meetings.***

Before they were called Christians, followers of Christ have been called "The Way". One of the reasons was, that they have literally found "the way to live." The nature of Church is not reflected in a constant series of religious meetings led by professional clergy in holy rooms specially reserved to experience Jesus, but in the prophetic way followers of Christ live their everyday life in spiritual extended families as a vivid answer to the questions society faces, at the place where it counts most: in their homes.

### ***2. Time to change the system***

In aligning itself to the religious patterns of the day, the historic Orthodox Church after Constantine in the 4th century AD adopted a religious system which was in essence Old Testament, complete with priests, altar, a Christian temple (cathedral), frankincense and a Jewish, synagogue-style worship pattern. The Roman Catholic Church went on to canonize the system. Luther did reform the content of the gospel, but left the outer forms of "church" remarkably untouched; the Free-Churches freed the system from the State, the Baptists then baptized it, the Quakers dry-cleaned it, the Salvation Army put it into a uniform, the Pentecostals anointed it and the Charismatics renewed it, but until today nobody has really changed the superstructure. It is about time to do just that.

### **3. The Third Reformation.**

In rediscovering the gospel of salvation by faith and grace alone, Luther started to reform the Church through a reformation of theology. In the 18th century through movements like the Moravians there was a recovery of a new intimacy with God, which led to a reformation of spirituality, the Second Reformation. Now God is touching the wineskins themselves, initiating a Third Reformation, a reformation of structure.

### **4. From Church-Houses to house-churches**

Since New Testament times, there is no such thing as "a house of God". At the cost of his life, Stephen reminded unequivocally: God does not live in temples made by human hands. The Church is the people of God. The Church, therefore, was and is at home where people are at home: in ordinary houses. There, the people of God:

share their lives in the power of the Holy Spirit,  
have "*meetings*," that is, they eat when they meet;  
they often do not even hesitate to sell private property and share  
material and spiritual blessings,  
teach each other in real-life situations how to obey God's word—  
dialogue- and not professor-style,  
pray and prophesy with each other,  
baptize,  
'lose their face' and their ego by confessing their sins,  
regaining a new corporate identity by experiencing love, acceptance  
and forgiveness.

### **5. The church has to become small in order to grow big**

Most churches of today are simply too big to provide real fellowship. They have too often become "fellowships without fellowship." The New Testament Church was a mass of small groups, typically between 10 and 15 people. It grew not upward into big congregations between 20 and 300 people filling a cathedral and making real, mutual communication improbable. Instead, it multiplied "sideways"—like organic cells—once these groups reached around 15-20 people. Then, if possible, it drew all the Christians together into citywide celebrations, as with Solomon's Temple court in Jerusalem. The traditional congregational church as we know it is, statistically speaking, neither big nor beautiful, but rather a sad compromise, an overgrown house-church and an under-grown celebration, often missing the dynamics of both.



## **6. No church is led by a Pastor alone**

The local church is not led by a Pastor, but fathered by an Elder, a local person of wisdom and reality. The local house-churches are then networked into a movement by the combination of elders and members of the so-called five-fold ministries (Apostles, Prophets, Pastors, Evangelists and Teachers) circulating "from house to house," whereby there is a special foundational role to play for the apostolic and prophetic ministries (Eph. 2:20, and 4:11,12). A Pastor (shepherd) is a very necessary part of the whole team, but he cannot fulfill more than a part of the whole task of "equipping the saints for the ministry," and has to be complemented synergistically by the other four ministries in order to function properly.

## **7. The right pieces – fitted together in the wrong way**

In doing a puzzle, we need to have the right original for the pieces, otherwise the final product, the whole picture, turns out wrong, and the individual pieces do not make much sense. This has happened to large parts of the Christian world: we have all the right pieces, but have fitted them together wrong, because of fear, tradition, religious jealousy and a power-and-control mentality. As water is found in three forms—ice, water and steam—the five ministries mentioned in Eph. 4:11-12, the Apostles, Prophets, Pastors, Teachers and Evangelists are also found today, but not always in the right forms and in the right places: they are often frozen to ice in the rigid system of institutionalized Christianity; they sometimes exist as clear water; or they have vanished like steam into the thin air of free-flying ministries and "independent" churches, accountable to no-one. As it is best to water flowers with the fluid version of water, these five equipping ministries will have to be transformed back into new—and at the same time age-old—forms, so that the whole spiritual organism can flourish and the individual "ministers" can find their proper role and place in the whole. That is one more reason why we need to return back to the Maker's original and blueprint for the Church.

## **8. God does not leave the Church in the hands of bureaucratic clergy**

No expression of a New Testament church is ever led by just one professional "holy man" doing the business of communicating with God and then feeding some relatively passive religious consumers Moses-style. Christianity has adopted this method from pagan religions, or at best from the Old Testament. The heavy professionalisation of the church since Constantine has now been a pervasive influence long enough, dividing the people of God artificially into

laity and clergy. According to the New Testament (1 Tim. 2:5), "*there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.*" God simply does not bless religious professionals to force themselves in-between people and God forever. The veil is torn, and God is allowing people to access Himself directly through Jesus Christ, the only Way. To enable the priesthood of all believers, the present system will have to change completely. Bureaucracy is the most dubious of all administrative systems, because it basically asks only two questions: yes or no. There is no room for spontaneity and humanity, no room for real life. This may be OK for politics and companies, but not the Church. God seems to be in the business of delivering His Church from a Babylonian captivity of religious bureaucrats and controlling spirits into the public domain, the hands of ordinary people made extraordinary by God, who, like in the old days, may still smell of fish, perfume and revolution.

### ***9. Return from organized to organic forms of Christianity***

The "Body of Christ" is a vivid description of an organic, not an organized, being. Church consists on its local level of a multitude of spiritual families, which are organically related to each other as a network, where the way the pieces are functioning together is an integral part of the message of the whole. What has become a maximum of organization with a minimum of organism, has to be changed into a minimum of organization to allow a maximum of organism. Too much organization has, like a straightjacket, often choked the organism for fear that something might go wrong. Fear is the opposite of faith, and not exactly a Christian virtue. Fear wants to control, faith can trust. Control, therefore, may be good, but trust is better. The Body of Christ is entrusted by God into the hands of steward-minded people with a supernatural charismatic gift to believe God that He is still in control, even if they are not. A development of trust-related regional and national networks, not a new arrangement of political ecumenism is necessary for organic forms of Christianity to reemerge.

### ***10. From worshipping our worship to worshipping God***

The image of much of contemporary Christianity can be summarized, a bit euphemistically, *as holy people coming regularly to a holy place at a holy day at a holy hour to participate in a holy ritual lead by a holy man dressed in holy clothes against a holy fee.* Since this regular performance-oriented

enterprise called "worship service" requires a lot of organizational talent and administrative bureaucracy to keep going, formalized and institutionalized patterns developed quickly into rigid traditions. Statistically, a traditional 1-2 hour "worship service" is very resource-hungry but actually produces very little fruit in terms of discipling people, that is, in changed lives. Economically speaking, it might be a "high input and low output" structure. Traditionally, the desire to "worship in the right way" has led to much denominationalism, confessionalism and nominalism. This not only ignores that Christians are called to "worship in truth and in spirit," not in cathedrals holding songbooks, but also ignores that most of life is informal, and so is Christianity as "the Way of Life." Do we need to change from being powerful actors to start "acting powerfully?"

### ***11. Stop bringing people to church, and start bringing the church to the people***

The church is changing back from being a Come-structure to being again a Go-structure. As one result, the Church needs to stop trying to bring people "into the church," and start bringing the Church to the people. The mission of the Church will never be accomplished just by adding to the existing structure; it will take nothing less than a mushrooming of the church through spontaneous multiplication of itself into areas of the population of the world, where Christ is not yet known.

### ***12. Rediscovering the "Lord's Supper" to be a real supper with real food***

Church tradition has managed to "celebrate the Lord's Supper" in a homeopathic and deeply religious form, characteristically with a few drops of wine, a tasteless cookie and a sad face. However, the "Lord's Supper" was actually more a *substantial supper with a symbolic meaning*, than a *symbolic supper with a substantial meaning*. God is restoring eating back into our meeting.

### ***13. From Denominations to city-wide celebrations***

Jesus called a universal movement, and what came was a series of religious companies with global chains marketing their special brands of Christianity and competing with each other. Through this branding of Christianity most of Protestantism has, therefore, become politically insignificant and often more concerned with traditional specialties and religious infighting than with developing a collective testimony before the world. Jesus simply never asked

people to organize themselves into denominations. In the early days of the Church, Christians had a dual identity: they were truly His church and vertically converted to God, and then organized themselves according to geography, that is, converting also horizontally to each other on earth. This means not only Christian neighbors organizing themselves into neighborhood- or house-churches, where they share their lives locally, but Christians coming together as a collective identity as much as they can for citywide or regional celebrations expressing the corporateness of the Church of the city or region. Authenticity in the neighborhoods connected with a regional or citywide corporate identity will make the Church not only politically significant and spiritually convincing, but will allow a return to the biblical model of the City-Church.

#### ***14. Developing a persecution-proof spirit***

They crucified Jesus, the Boss of all the Christians. Today, his followers are often more into titles, medals and social respectability, or, worst of all, they remain silent and are not worth being noticed at all. "Blessed are you when you are persecuted", says Jesus. Biblical Christianity is a healthy threat to pagan godlessness and sinfulness, a world overcome by greed, materialism, jealousy and any amount of demonic standards of ethics, sex, money and power. Contemporary Christianity in many countries is simply too harmless and polite to be worth persecuting. But as Christians again live out New Testament standards of life and, for example, call sin as sin, conversion or persecution has been, is and will be the natural reaction of the world. Instead of nesting comfortably in temporary zones of religious liberty, Christians will have to prepare to be again discovered as the main culprits against global humanism, the modern slavery of having to have fun and the outright worship of Self, the wrong centre of the universe. That is why Christians will and must feel the "repressive tolerance" of a world which has lost any absolutes and therefore refuses to recognize and obey its creator God with his absolute standards. Coupled with the growing ideologisation, privatization and spiritualisation of politics and economics, Christians will—sooner than most think—have their chance to stand happily accused in the company of Jesus. They need to prepare now for the future by developing a persecution-proof spirit and an even more persecution-proof structure.

#### ***15. The Church comes home***

Where is the easiest place, say, for a man to be spiritual? Maybe again, is it hiding behind a big pulpit, dressed up in holy robes, preaching holy words to a faceless crowd and then disappearing into an office? And what is the most

difficult—and therefore most meaningful—place for a man to be spiritual? At home, in the presence of his wife and children, where everything he does and says is automatically put through a spiritual litmus test against reality, where hypocrisy can be effectively weeded out and authenticity can grow. Much of Christianity has fled the family, often as a place of its own spiritual defeat, and then has organized artificial performances in sacred buildings far from the atmosphere of real life. As God is in the business of recapturing the homes, the church turns back to its roots—back to where it came from. It literally comes home, completing the circle of Church history at the end of world history.

**A**s Christians of all walks of life, from all denominations and backgrounds, feel a clear echo in their spirit to what God's Spirit is saying to the Church, and start to hear globally in order to act locally, they begin to function again as one body. They stop asking God to bless what they are doing - and start doing what God is blessing. They organize themselves into neighborhood house-churches and meet in regional or city-celebrations. You are invited to become part of this movement and make your own contribution. Maybe your home, too, will become a house that changes the world.

### Why and for whom this book was written

This booklet is the product of many people in many countries, and draws on the learning experiences of a wide variety of servants of God. Not only have I physically been writing the notes for it over the last 2 years in Colombia, USA, Germany, Switzerland, England, Sudan, Egypt, Cyprus, Saudi Arabia, Muscat, Dubai, India, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Korea, China and Mongolia, but I have been able to discuss these issues with numerous Pastors and Missionaries and Christian Leaders. Most important of all, I wanted to listen intently to normal Christians and their dreams and experiences. I am thankful for all those inspiring moments, visits, listening to stories, having discussions, drinking tea. And I am also inspired by a host of valuable books and other materials; they are simply too numerous to mention.

Although German is the language I grew up with, I have attempted to write this book in English - and it shows! I beg that people whose mother-tongue is English will forgive any liberties I may have taken with their language.

Jesus has given us the commission to *go and make disciples of all nations*. It is the growing conviction of many Christians around the world, that this will only be ever achieved by having a church - the shopping window of God - in walking distance of every person on the globe. The church - the secret and powerful society of the redeemed - must again become the place where people can literally see the Body of Christ, where His glory is revealed in the most practical of all terms - hands on, down to earth, right next door, unable to overlook or ignore, living every day amongst us. The process to move towards the goal of whole nations - countries and people groups and regions - being disciplined by a mass dispersion of the presence of Christ has come to be known as "Saturation Church Planting," the process which God seems to choose in nation after nation to mobilize all his people to work together towards that ultimate goal. The word saturation means to "fill to the brim", to make full of, to reach a critical mass. God is the God of Nations. You will quickly see that planting a few churches here and there is just not enough. What will it take to see whole nations disciplined, with millions of inhabitants and tens of thousands of villages, with longstanding nonchristian - or worse - pseudochristian - traditions and customs and formidable spiritual forces of their own, with poverty and urbanization and any conceivable difference of opinions, colors, castes and clans, tribes and language groups? Many have told me, often enough with tears in their eyes, that their nation will not truly change its values and be disciplined by anything artificial, by being briefly touched for a fleeting moment by the abbreviated Gospel of a rather short-lived campaign or programme, by an evangelistic Blitzkrieg or even by the type of church that has been there for the last 5, 50 or 500 years. Nothing short of the very presence of the living Christ in every neighborhood and village of every corner of the nation will do. He has come to live amongst us - and stay on. We therefore need to plant and water churchplanting movements that plant and water other churchplanting movements - until there is no space left for anyone to misunderstand, ignore or even escape the presence of Jesus in the form that he has chosen to take, while on Earth - the local church.

This book focuses on the question, *what type of church will it take to do just that?* And how do we plant those type of churches?

It is a *vision statement* in the sense that it tries to capture and express the visions, hopes and expectations of many Christians around the globe for a New Testament type church that will truly *disciple* nations - and not only fill them; this also implies a natural tendency to speak in "big-picture," broad-stroke language with the inbuilt danger to oversimplify life's complexities and sound almost simplistic at times; and I am painfully aware of that. I trust God will use others better gifted than me to fill in the blanks I have to leave open.

It is a *manifesto* in the sense that it declares a threefold conviction: that without a return to the New Testament simplicity of housechurches; the empowering Five-Fold ministry to spawn a flood of quality housechurches; and the strategic process of saturation church planting as a united effort of the Body of Christ, we will continue to fall short of being obedient to the Great Commission. The number of people alive today - more than 6 billion - is more than all those in history combined. If ever we needed to recover a New Testament church to disciple the nations, now would be a good time.

It is a *churchplanting manual* in the sense that it will explain how to plant housechurches. As every company knows, it is best to develop a working prototype of a product first, and then head for mass production. If we know what type of church we want, we will also know how to plant and multiply it.

### Why no models?

For some good reasons, I have tried to resist the temptation to describe a multitude of models, which could be used as a blueprint for copying. I also have avoided including issues like "six easy steps to plant a housechurch-movement", because I believe it is neither easy nor adviseable to take formulas and existing models and make Xerox-copies of them. One reason is: I simply do not believe in copycat-mentality. It is more important for spiritually significant *principles* to sink in and to be grasped, then to simply take a 5-step outline and copy it. Instead of importing spiritual success-stories of others I would find it much more natural if we all search for the ways, which God has ordained for our time and our places to put into practice, what we feel he has revealed to us. I do not want to spare anyone of us this creative tension.

Another reason is, that many are looking for a proven truth, a foolproof method and model, a concept which a sufficient number of others have already tried out and tested, before they take "a leap of faith" and go and do likewise. This "play it safe"-mentality, I would suggest, is a spiritual way of hiding fear which sounds very reasonable, and we may leap, but not really out of faith. The core secret of followers of Christ, men and women alike, to do the works of Jesus is not that they demand academic and sufficient statistical proof before they act, but the faithful and obedient desire to follow Christ's word and do what He said, no matter what, when, where or who has gone before.

## What about the existing church structure

Nobody lives in a vacuum, and many of us will have grown up in denominational structures or work in areas with an existing church history. We will be unable to turn back the wheel of history altogether, but nowhere in the Bible are we also challenged to stoically take the Status Quo for granted, but "*to be perfect as God is perfect*". This book is not written to suggest that housechurches are the only possible way of Church. However, it does suggest *that if we want to see whole nations disciplined* according to the biblical command of Jesus, we will not be able to accomplish much without either radically returning back to New Testament principles and dynamics of Church - or making room for others to do so. The focus and perspective of *discipling the nations* is very different *from maintaining a certain church tradition or sitting in the ivory tower of theoretical reflexion*. If housechurches are a valid expression of the Church - which I am advocating here - then we need to embrace it at least as one of many valid forms of Church, and see its potential unfold towards discipling the nations. I believe that God has been blessing the world through the existing Church structures, and has done and is still doing uncounted miracles of transforming peoples lives and doing good in ways too numerous to mention. But even the Church should never settle for less than it has been made for. I believe churches - including housechurches!- come in all grades and shades of human works coupled with the work of God, an ever changing mix of spirit and flesh, as long as we will occupy this earth. But, as it is for us, we are all called to lean as much towards the works of the Spirit as possible, and to root out the works of the flesh, if we can. This is humanly impossible, and let me say it already here: the Church of God is God's invention and humanly not "doable" or makeable; it cannot be fabricated nor manufactured, but will only emerge as we yield ourselves to God and become His very junior partners and stewards in His work of calling back His creation through His Church unto Himself. But there is hope! God, in His sovereign ways, is able to do the undoable: to make wine out of water, to make donkeys talk and water flow from a rock, part the sea - and, most astonishing - even use ordinary humans for His divine glory. This book is not advocating for you and me to dream up and paint a perfect and almost romantic picture of Church and admire it from a distance like in a museum, but to get personally involved as a response to what God is calling *us* to do. In this book, I have made plain what I feel God is calling the Church to be, or to become, and I am willing to be personally involved locally and globally for that task. I must confess that I do feel very inadequate at times, loaded with any amount of my own various Church traditions and many inadequacies and biases. This also means that I am painfully aware that this book is only an introductory and unfinished statement, which I am more than happy to admit. But even the unfinished nature of this book is part of the message: *deus semper major*, God is always bigger - than we think. Yes, we have seen something, but yes, it is also only a part.

But most of all this book is intended to inspire, cheerlead and celebrate those Christians who will be God's instruments of gathering the harvest in this last leg of history. As many prophets tell us, it will be a generation of nobodies, without faces and titles who lead God's movement on Earth to fulfil its calling. They will do it



under persecution or celebrated in talk shows (which one is worse?), under unspeakable difficulties or walking on red carpets, despised or adored, ridiculed or consulted, cheated or honored, scorned or quoted, tortured or pampered, unknown or known, with frequent flyer cards or walking bare foot. In other words, this is a battle cry for ordinary followers of Christ, who, through their humble, self-denying and obedient lives, will be made extraordinary in purpose and power, and therefore flood this earth with housechurches, the presence, knowledge and glory of Christ, like the waters cover the sea.

# 1. The Reinvention of Church

## *Bridging the church gap*

It is an interesting phenomenon: never in history has there been a phase with more significant and global growth of the Christian Church. Some current statistics indicate that between 2.000 and 3.000 churches are planted every week. The worldwide evangelical church has grown from about 150 million in the year 1974 to about 650 million in 1998, and is today, according to *C.Peter Wagner* and *Ralph Winter*, the fastest growing minority on earth.

And yet, at this time of great excitement - and even triumph in some groups, the level of dissatisfaction and frustration with "church as we know it" has probably also reached global proportions. We read of many people "coming to Christ" every day, and we rejoice. But we usually do not hear much of those numbers entering membership rolls of local churches, and even less we hear about the silent exodus of people slipping out almost unnoticed of the back doors of churches again; they were attracted, but not contained; interested, but not inserted into an enveloping fellowship; harvested and cut, but not gathered into the barn; touched, but not transformed; turned to briefly look at The Way, then turned away, disappointed with what they saw.

### God yes, church no

In a research done in the early 90's in Netherlands, Amsterdam, young people have been asked whether they were interested in God. 100% of them answered yes. Then they were asked whether they are interested in church, 1% said yes, 99% said no. I remember that most Pastors who heard this story used to indicate that something is seriously wrong with those Youth in Amsterdam, since everything - can it be any different - is right with the church. Today I reluctantly like to consider it the other way around. Maybe the Youth of Amsterdam has some lessons to teach the church which we have been rather unwilling to learn. Maybe we have fallen so much in love with our own traditions that we are almost unable to truly "hear and feel" the world from our safe and "holy" distance.

### Non-Baptized Believers

Another research conducted nearly a decade ago by Dr. Herbert E. Hoefler, former Director of Gurukul Theological College (Madras, India) reveals that more than 200,000 what Hoefler calls "Non Baptized believers in Christ" secretly exist in this city of 8 Million. This growing number would call themselves Christians, but do not go to church, for a variety of reasons. One reason they state, however, is that they are attracted to Jesus, but not attracted to the church as they have experienced it.

Ask almost anyone who is not yet a Christian what crosses his mind when he hears the word "evangelical Church." Chances are, you would not like what you will hear. It is amazing how well, many Christians are able to hide or brush over their own deep

frustration with the church. "Look to Jesus, not to the church," they say. And we know deep down that something is desperately wrong with that statement.

There is a buzzing activity about the church and missions like never before today. But - also like never before - Pastors are swapping churches, dropping out of ministry or applying for "sabbaticals," missionaries are burning out, and many ordinary Christians simply leave their churches without returning back. Countless Christians have told me that after trying this model of church, that recipe of revival, riding this wave and catching the spirit that way, attending this "lifechanging seminar" and that "anointed conference" their lives and their churches are still dreadfully the same, and they are prepared to give up or just hold on for dear life.

#### The crisis of Missions is a crisis of the Church

"*I don't like books on missions*", says Stephen Gaukroger, President of the Baptist Union of England and Wales, in the foreword to Patrick Johnstone's book "The Church is bigger than you think". "*They usually tell me what I already know and then make me feel guilty for not doing more about it!*" The traditional understanding of missions encourages churches or individual people to "go to the missions field, give money or send someone else to go." But many times this leaves a bad aftertaste, because we never know when we have gone, done, spent or sent *enough*. Patrick Johnstone says it this way: "We live in a time when our perception of what constitutes the structures of the Church has been molded by inadequate theology and distorted patterns inherited over the centuries. Few realize the impact of these distortions on congregational life. We soon find out that bashing congregations with a mission challenge or attempting to prick consciences in public meetings bears meager fruit. We find that the church has inherited a mind-set or worldview which has excluded missions altogether". It is no surprise to me that churches who are not built on apostolic and prophetic foundations (Eph. 2:20) have no apostolic and prophetic mind-set. This is to be expected. The crisis of traditional missions is a crisis of the church. If mission is the natural heartbeat of an apostolic church, it is an expression of God's grace manifested in apostolic people, not a church trying to fulfill its mission quota. We need to take the "legalistic whip" out of mission, and I suggest we start at the very heart of missions, with our understanding of the church. I suggest that the whip is not only evident in missions, it is at home in the church as a result of a lack of grace and an overdose of legalism, which often creeps in where the apostolic and prophetic ministry are missing and are being replaced by dutiful teachers, beautiful pastors and daring evangelists.

But I intend to point out later that as church is reinvented, mission will be completely revived, too. "*When the church rejects its mission, the Church ceases to be the Church*", says Donald Miller. But when the church again becomes the church and accepts its apostolic and prophetic nature, then it can become God's instrument of transforming and disciplining neighborhoods and nations. And an individual church can be used by God, in the spirit of global partnership, to pour its oil on other peoples'

fire, so that the light increases and the world may see whom it has overlooked for all too long: Jesus Christ.

## The Church-gap

Many Pastors know and even say "that the church we preach about is very different from the church we preach to. That's the very reason why we preach."

*If even pastors admit that, what about new Christians?*

*"In the days of coffee bar evangelism," says English Church-planter Terry Virgo, "there were conferences held on how to bridge the awful gulf between the coffee bar and the church. It was meant for new Christians to help them to cope with dead, irrelevant, formal church services. Once they were told that this cold, unchanging monotony was the people of God enjoying abundant life. Some, therefore, even suggested a half-way house, where people could be prepared for church life."*

In the original days of Willowcreek Community Church in Chicago, which has seeker-oriented worship services - worship experiences tailor-made for those seeking God, where not-yet believers are specifically made welcome and given a comfortable, nonembarrassing and "safe place for a dangerous message", they were well aware of the "church-gap", the fascination of people with the person of Jesus, and the dissatisfaction of many with the local church. At that time, however humorously, they suggested a sevenfold strategy of Evangelism: 1. Spend quality time with Non-Christians; 2. Protect them from the church. 3. Witness to those new friends about Jesus Christ. 4. Protect them from the church. 5. Lead them to Christ. 6. Protect them from the church. 7. When they have matured a bit and are ready even for a culture shock, introduce them to the church for the first time.

Who follows up whom?

A missionary told me about a church of about 200 attenders in Europe which wanted to invite Non-christians for a "special event service". With the help of a lot of advertising, 50 new people attended this special event. "Of course, very few of them actually came back to church. But we are following them up," he said. I was amazed. If 50 non-believers attend a church service and go away fairly indifferent and not exactly thrilled with this experience, why is it that the church does not bear the consequences? Should it not be on its own knees trying to find out what has obviously desperately gone wrong with itself, that so many people can come in touch with it - and go rather untouched? Could it be that the church would much rather have to follow-up itself, than bothering unimpressed and indifferent one-time visitors with spiritual sales-techniques? After 1.700 years of post-Constantine Christendom, can we afford to still discuss how to change the world without being ready to change ourselves? Maybe we all need to follow the advise of Rick Warren in his book "The

Purpose driven church”, to “*stop asking God to bless what we are doing, and start doing what he is blessing*”.

### The Third Reformation

German Church Growth researcher Christian A. Schwarz suggests that we are in the era of the Third Reformation. The first reformation happened in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, when Martin Luther rediscovered the core essence of the Gospel: salvation by faith, the centrality of importance of grace and scripture. It was a *reformation of theology*.

The second reformation occurred in the 18<sup>th</sup> century at the time of the Moravian and later the Wesleyan movements, where personal intimacy with Christ was rediscovered. It was, he says, a *reformation of spirituality*, which, born on passionate knees in front of a loving and personal Savior, gave birth to a whole new era of enthusiastic missions and evangelism.

However, all of this was still very much pouring new wine into old wineskins, and sewing new patches onto old cloth. The Roman Catholic Church and Mass System was very close to the Old Testament temple-centred worship patterns, complete with frankincense, priests, sections for the lay people and clerics, and an altar. Luther did reform the content of the Gospel, but did not change the basic structure of the “worship service”. This reformed-Roman-Catholic-Jewish meeting-pattern was baptized by Baptists, anointed by Pentecostals, misused by Cults, renewed by Charismatic Christians, put into uniform by the Salvation Army, dry-cleaned by Quakers - but was never really radically changed. The “services” were still essentially performances, audience-oriented masses, usually formal and liturgical religious events, where many spectators and consumers observe a few very involved religious specialists performing for them and with them.

The third and last part of the Reformation is, therefore, a *reformation of structure*. It is not suggesting to make a few cosmetic changes or alterations here and there, but to build according to New Testament patterns altogether. If that means that we have to start all over again, then this is exactly what it means, and this will be what it will take. Let me try to say this with a few illustrations and pictures:

### Large cars during the Oil Crisis

During the oil crisis in the 70s it was fairly difficult to sell large cars, because petrol was so costly. Carmakers were scratching their heads, looking at the heap of unsold cars in their parking lots. This does remind me sometimes of the situation of the churches in a number of nations. Is the model of church we are offering simply too costly, too big? Does the market require another product?

### Clogged assembly line

Along a similar line, I would liken the situation of churchplanting in a number of nations with a clogged assembly line. The product (new church) seems to be

extremely hard to sell and sits figuratively on an assembly line clogging it up for lack of excited customers who want to buy that product. Result: The system shuts down, the work inches forward, people become more and more frustrated. Could it be that we have become specialists in reproducing assembly lines, but have failed to spend enough time in examining our prototype product?

### Solving the Puzzle

Imagine a young boy, unwrapping a new puzzle and immediately trying to put together the pieces. He pulls out a piece of cardboard from the puzzle box, depicting a red race car (he loves red race cars!). All excited about this new toy, he tries to assemble the pieces according to the red race car blue print. But somehow or other the pieces do not seem to fit as they should. He manages to bend them and tear off an edge here and there in order to make them fit with a little "convincing force", but something seems to be very wrong. Finally his father comes to his rescue. Dad immediately spots the problem, takes the beautiful cardboard with the red race car on it - and turns it around. And lo and behold, on the "other" side is a beautiful tree, the "original". The red race car was only the advertisement for another puzzle of the company! The boy sighed with relief, and tried to put together the pieces according to the new original - and within minutes he was done. What was wrong before? He had all the right pieces, but the wrong original. He had unquestionable and honest motives, but quite simply the wrong blue print.

### Spiritual Xerox-machines

Could it be that this is, in short, the situation of a large part of Christendom today? We have all the right pieces. The word of God; People; houses; prayer; motivation; money. But could it be that we put them all together according to a wrong original? Our very own beloved red race car? Has the unthinkable happened that someone sinister has cunningly slipped us an impractical blueprint? And could it be that here we stand, transfixed in front of our spiritual Xerox-copy machines (translate bible schools, publishing houses, seminaries or leadership-producing programs), and keep hitting that green button which says "Copy" and wait for it to make copies of what we are convinced to be a biblical, canonized, unquestionable Bible- and history proven first-hand "original."

I can imagine Satan, the enemy of the Church, having no problem with even the most frantic evangelistic or mission activities and programs - as long as it is all about making copies of "red race cars", of a pattern of Church which is not seriously endangering his satanic claims on mankind. Maybe it is time for us to stop scratching the surface of humanity and allow God to re-invent and recreate Church in all of us. It might start with us re-examining our blueprints and turning around our originals.

### Stop starting with the church

Most of us will have grown up or decided to be part of one Christian denomination or another, and we will usually see and interpret Christianity - and even the Bible - through reading glasses of our own familiar tradition, "our way of belief and practice". Which tradition is right? As Argentinean Evangelist Juan Carlos Ortiz once pointed out: "There are more than 22.000 denominations in the world. How lucky are you, that you happen to be just in the right one!" Since then, not only has the number of denominations risen to between 24.000 and 30.000, but many start to understand that most problems of today's churches do not lie so much outside the system, but inside the system, that is, inside our inherited, learned and dear patterns of belief and practice, the way we "do church."

Who is to blame?

*"Our bookshelves are full of Christian books and videos. We have churches on every major street, more staff people than ever before, large Sunday school departments, cell systems, mega- and meta-church seminars. We have Christian bumper stickers, political action groups, huge parachurch ministries - and in the midst of it all, we have lost every major city in North America", says Ted Haggard of New Life Church in Colorado Springs in his book "Primary purpose - Making it hard for people to go to hell from your city". He goes on to say: "Rather than rethinking our methods and challenging our own effectiveness, we try to escape responsibility for the eternal damnation of those in our communities by blaming others for our own spiritual ineffectiveness."*

### A Western model of Church for the whole world?

Although there are around 240 nations in the world, the last centuries have seen great activity in exporting models of Church from basically only four countries into all the world: Germany, Great Britain, USA and Italy. Most churches and movements today still have religious headquarters in one of those countries, or are at least strongly connected (and influenced) from those countries. While I do not deny the blessings of this mission era at all, I would like to point to the fact that this has also led to one of the greatest monopolizations of Church around the world, where one (western!) model of Church has become a standard and dominating practice practically everywhere. Whilst American writer Gene Edwards decries this in a disturbing book as "the Americanization of the Church", I would like to simply remind us that Jesus was not a "Westerner". Given the fact that the four main mission-world powers have been caught up in recent wars with each other, killing each other in front of the eyes of the rest of the world, we need to realize that - as "christian nations" - they lost a large amount of global christian credibility. Money, materials, rhetoric and even a well oiled mission machinery cannot replace genuine calling. I believe we have moved from a colonial era of mission into what I call "national mission", where each nation is called to develop it's own models of church. Often enough this will have to happen by people in every nation praying on their own knees, shedding their own tears, incarnating the living Christ afresh within their time and culture. If "the

West” can then come and, in the spirit of ”crucified colonialism”, the opposite of imperialism and denoiminationism, carefully pour some oil on this process, it would be wonderful.

#### The traditional church - biggest barrier to belief

In a study in 1994 under the title ”Barriers to Belief” in Scotland, says Rev. John Campbell, *”many have indicated that one of the greatest barriers to belief in God is the Church itself.”* If the problem is the system, then even our best solution is part of the problem. That leaves even the most dedicated, visionary, passionate and revived Christians trapped in a system which is sucking their very energy and is simply overpowering. The way forward, therefore, may not be hidden in slight changes and adaptations to some new forms in ”Church as we know it”, but in a much more radical rediscovery of the very nature of Church itself. The quickest way to ”Church the unchurched” may very well be to ”unchurch the Church.” Bob Hopkins, one of the initiators of the Anglican Church Planting Initiative in England, has therefore recommended to ”stop starting with the Church”. What this implies is that we might want to stop taking today’s Churches and its ”worship patterns” for absolutely granted. It seems, after all, that God has been waiting for a long time throughout history, ready to give the right answers to those asking the right questions. Housechurches, in other words, are the missing link between spirituality and society, between Jesus and his Body, between heaven and earth.

#### A stumbling block or a treasure

Jesus compares the Kingdom of God to a man who finds a treasure while ploughing a field (Mt 13:44) and then goes on to sell all his possessions to buy the field - and the treasure. What first looks like a stumbling block, a misplaced rock, interrupting the daily routine and initially annoys and upsets the fixed agenda of ”ploughing the fields day by day” even in traditional church life, may turn out to be the greatest find of a persons life. Let me forewarn you a bit: This may happen to you too, as God speaks to you about housechurches in His own ways. Maybe the answers to the questions of so many of us are hidden, but close, waiting to be stumbled upon, locked behind a forbidden door other people do not even think exists. We may find it out of unbearable agony with the status quo, because we seriously search and then find, or as a result of a simple accident. But at this point, housechurches may yet be something completely unthinkable, literally unheard of, something which even sounds almost heretical in the beginning, but becomes clearer and clearer as we move on through the fog of tradition and reread our bibles. However, take a piece of advise from the parable of the hidden treasure. As you discover it, do not go to town and make a big announcement on the market place. Hide it again in the field, go and sell all that you have, and then go buy it and do whatever God shows you to do.



### "Reconstructing" the Church

Many Churches who are desperate for renewal - or at least change - tend to overlook that you cannot produce a new quality in the Church by changing the structures. Management-Guru Tom Peters says, renewal and reformation is out - revolution is in; a company does not really need a CEO- a Chief Executive Officer, but a CDO - a Chief Destruction Officer, regularly dismantling blocking traditions, because it is so much easier to rebuild according to a new pattern than to restore and renew an outdated one. Changing a church by changing some outward forms is as futile as trying to change your mentality by putting on another dress or walking backwards from now on to stop you from going to cinemas. Adding a new mission statement or any other cosmetic alterations without a radical genetic reformation of the church will only lead to frustration - like sewing a patch of new cloth onto old cloth, which, says Jesus, is bad advise. Revival and reformation truly starts with a complete rediscovery and reconstruction of the core essence of the church, with New Testament DNA, the genetical code of God, supernaturally empowered with growth potential from within (Mark 4:26). This spiritual seed material is, like any grain of wheat, equipped and able to develop it's own appropriate structures from the inside-out, without instruction from outside; it simply unfolds itself according to a creational blueprint within, it unzips. It's soil is literally the soil of nations and peoplegroups. The result of this incarnation, at least in New Testament times, was a housechurch movement, that swept the city of Jerusalem like yeast in a dough, or like an unstoppable virus, in maybe less than two years.

### Biotic principles

Almost all life forms are based on the multiplication of organic cells. Unlimited growth is not a creational principle, but multiplication is. My friend Christian Schwarz has studied what he calls "biotic" principles, patterns that operate within God's created order of organic life. This lead him to develop what he calls "Natural Church Growth". Many insights are drawn from agricultural and biological contexts where growth is definitely according to the divine pattern and method, and not like the humanly-devised artificial patterns of mechanical production and growth. These biotic principles stand in stark contrast to the "technocratic" methods which govern machines. They are as different from each other as a robot is from a human being. One is a machine while the other is an organism. The "machine" or "robot" model functions very well in the world of technology but fails in the world of biotic, organic growth. When we understand that the church is a creation of God, a "biotic" organism, we must look for God's natural, organic principles to understand how it grows. Biotic principles utilize the minimum amount of energy to produce the maximum results, an effective "all-by-itself" development. This avoids the church becoming manufactured, but allows it to be recreated by the Spirit of God according to God's creational patterns. We simply labor in vain if we follow only man-made patterns or formulas, even if they are handed to us in the form of good and cherished traditions. Some biotic principles are

*Structured interdependence*, meaning that the way the parts of an organism are inter-related are more important than the parts themselves. All organic cells arrange themselves not in a chaos guided by chance, but according to a creation and inbuilt pattern where each cell or organ is linked with others. In terms of church multiplication this means that no issue or topic or aspect should be seen or even treated in isolation of all the other aspects and parts.

*Multiplication*. Unlimited growth is not the ideal - multiplication is. The fruit of an apple tree is not an apple, but another apple tree. The fruit of a church is not a convert, but other churches that plant other churches.

*Energy transformation*. This is the principle that observes how existing forces (even contrary ones) can be used positively towards a desired goal. This is also how an organism fights a virus; not in a head-on collision, but using much of the energy of the intruder to defeat the intruder. Through a vaccination process former health-destroying energies are transformed into health promoting ones. Many churches use the boxer-approach to life instead, using energy to reduce an outside "attack" to zero, and then, in a second strike, deliver its own message.

#### *How to break the "20-Barrier"*

I have read a book written by Bill M. Sullivan, titled "Ten Steps to breaking the 200-barrier". The very healthy intention of Sullivan fits ideologically into the mainstream of the Church Growth movement of the 70s and 80s: Good churches grow big, and very good churches grow very big. Anything that stops a "healthy" church from growing is a barrier, and those barriers are bad and must therefore go. The idea of the "200-Barrier" is simple. Statistically most churches stop growing somewhere between 100 and 300 people, on average at about 200. There are good cultural, sociological and even architectural reasons for that. One is structural, an inbuilt problem of the traditional One-Pastor-church: There are only so many people (in the USA: 200) a Pastor can personally and effectively care for. He may have a lot of space in his agenda, but a quite limited space in his heart; and people realize that. Result: The growth grinds to a halt, the church hits an invisible ceiling, the "200 Barrier". However, I suggest there is a much more important barrier to overcome: the "20-Barrier". How do we break it?

#### The invisible line: from organic to organizational

As any family get-together will teach us, we can accomplish the goal of fellowship without the need to be heavily structured. Families can get along quite well without a master of ceremony, a word of introduction, a special song, a sermon by father and a vote of thanks by mother. These things happen at weddings and other festivals, but not in everyday life. Church, however, is not an artificial performance, it is for everyday life, because it is a way of life. There is, in each culture, a very important numerical line we can cross: from the organic to the organized, from the informal to the formal, from spontaneous to liturgical. I call this most important line the 20-

barrier, because in many cultures 20 is a maximum number where people still feel "family", organic and informal, without the need to get formal or organized. Organisms are structured, too, and I am not advocating a total absence of order and structure. But, different to an organized series of meetings which are typically structured from outside, organisms are usually structured from within. The nature of a meeting defines and therefore limits the size of a meeting. If we cross the "20-barrier", the group stops to be organic, and starts to become formal, and even feel the need to follow a set agenda. Effectiveness in relationship and mutual communication goes down, and the need for someone to coach and lead the meeting goes up. As a result, the housechurch loses its main original attractions, changes its values, and starts to develop totally different dynamics. It often simply stops functioning by itself, spontaneous and lively, lead invisibly and unobtrusively through the inbuilt family mechanisms of fathering and mothering, and needs to be literally "run", organized, and visibly lead into a new and organized life form - if there is such a thing. The original organism is then a thing of the past, still alive, but trapped into a formal structure that chokes it, conditions it, and ultimately could prevent relational and spontaneous fellowship in the name of organized fellowship. Biblical *koinonia* means fellowship or sharing, giving generously and participating and sharing something with someone. One of the fatal aspects of this line-crossing is that the original organic form of fellowship usually loses its internal reproduction potential, and can only be cloned and copied or even literally manufactured and finally mass produced with huge effort from outside that ignores and overrules its own in-built explosive growth potential. It is a fact of church history that it has always been a swift step from organized religion to institutionalism and fossilization.

#### Person number 21

One of the most important decisions in terms of the structure and future of a church anyone can possibly make, therefore, is what you do when person number 21 walks through the door. Structurally, that brings the church into the red phase. You either continue growing upwards and become organized and loose your housechurch-dynamics, and may ultimately hit the 200-barrier, or you divide the housechurch into two or three units and multiply it, thus growing sideways. You may not even notice a 200-barrier this way.

#### A wedding a week?

Life in any culture has two aspects, the private and the public, everyday-life and the special events, celebrations of weddings, function and festivals, funerals and traditional happenings. Both aspects of life have their own and valid ways of expression. Everyday life is usually expressed in the family, the basic cell unit of every society and culture. Families are usually very organic, informal, relational and consist of whatever it takes to share lives. Weddings and other functions are extraordinary events, for which everyone duly prepares; they are usually formal, need much organization and are often highly structured.

Imagine if you to attend a wedding each week. It follows the same basic pattern, has even the same bridegroom and bride, and maybe even the food is the same. After some weeks the excitement would wear down. You would know what to expect, and you know what's going to happen next. It still would remain a nice thing, a beautiful tradition, but it would feel odd to have the same type of festival every week.

We need to be careful not to do this with church. Jesus has shown us a way to live, not only a way to celebrate. Both aspects are necessary, both are good. But everyday life is not like a wedding, as any married couple will tell us. If we allow church to take on only "celebration structures", we will start celebrating "a wedding a week", and our behavior will soon be far removed from real life and cease to make sense to ordinary people. It would become an artificial weekly performance. If church is a God-given way of community life, and if life takes place in the basic unit of a family living in a home, there is nothing more appropriate than for the church to be a housechurch, to be the church based in simple, ordinary, everyday homes. Housechurches are not only a way for us humans to express community, *they are one of God's means to achieve community.*

### Small churches may already be far too big

Creation itself teaches us that nothing healthy grows endlessly, but stops growing at a point and starts multiplying. Bigger is not necessarily better or more beautiful. Could it be that it is perfectly OK to expect a church to grow - but we generally look into the wrong direction? We are intrigued by that well-publicized and very exceptional stories of megachurches, and overlook that they are usually extraordinary exceptions, due to extraordinary leaders and circumstances? Could it be that the problem is not so much to break the 200-barrier on the way up, but the 20-barrier on the way down? If real church growth spells m-u-l-t-i-p-l-i-c-a-t-i-o-n, then growth may not be upwards at all, but sideways. Has all that talk about "big is beautiful" tricked our thinking? If yes, maybe we will have to cut out a Zero in our mindset: an average church would then be just 8, 10 or 12 people; a large church has 15, and a "megachurch" sports not 1.000+ attenders, but 21 or more?.

Could it be that the average "small church" of 25 or 45 people, which is trying to rent a hall, or sanction a building fund, just bought a pulpit and still saves for an overhead projector, is not at all too small, but already far too big? They have crossed the organism-organization line long ago, trying "to grow up like all those other churches", not realizing that they already have become quite heavy and inflexible, structurally bloated and deformed, just like someone with a waterbelly suffering from his own weight, and only kept going and inching forward by the relentless activities of a busy "Pastor" or leader with his co-workers?

Worldwide the average size of churches is around 100. Only a very small percentage of churches become bigger than 200, and many are in the 40-60 bracket. The average Sunday-morning attendance of the Lutheran churches in Germany, for example, was 23.5 people in the year 1993.

### Shrink in order to grow

Maybe it simply requires a true apostolic gifting - which is statistically speaking fairly rare - to transform any given church into a megachurch. For many churches it could be a liberation to be allowed to become what many of them already are: slightly overgrown housechurches struggling with their own size and the unspoken original they are trying to become. Would it not be much more practical for them to head the other way, and become smaller, to move into the direction of housechurches, to "grow down" rather than keep on striving to "grow up"?

Elton Trueblood once said: *"The church must be smaller before it can be substantially stronger."* I agree. But if we take this one step further, this would also mean that the church of the future will have to become much smaller, before it can become substantially bigger, by becoming much more numerous. Statistically, it will have to shrink in order to grow.

### Swiss Prophets about Switzerland

A friend told me recently, that God had shown him a prophetic vision of the Thunersee, the "Lake Thun" near Interlaken. There he observed many small groups of Christians baptizing people. "The Lake Thun will be the biggest baptismal lake in Switzerland", God told him. "But why are those groups so small?" asked my friend. "They are housechurches," God told him.

Another senior friend of mine, now in his 70s, told me of a vision he had, where God had shown him in prayer that a new form of church will spread in Switzerland like wildfire: housechurches. As a result of this move of God there will be a large gathering of approximately 200.000 Christians at an open-air ground near the city of Luzern in the year 2.001, where those Christians will form themselves into a unity and speak collectively with one voice to Switzerland as a nation.

Pastor *Mike Bickle* from Kansas, USA, once shared how God had "revealed to him that he is going to change the forms and expressions of church within one generation to the degree that it will not be recognizable any more." That was in Cairo in the year 1982. The future will tell whether it was God or just a dream. Rick Joyner, a prophetic teacher from Charlotte, USA, says it this way: "I see such a sweeping return to Biblical Christianity coming, that the very understanding of Christianity, by both the world and the church, will be changed. This does not imply any kind of doctrinal changes as to what it means to be a Christian, but a change that causes us to live by the truths we proclaim. This will be reflected when we truly become known for our love for one another".

I do respect Amos 3: 7-8 and the biblical ministry of prophecy, and I am far from encouraging anyone to pick up stones of tradition and throw them at prophets. What if those visions - which are only part of a growing flood of voices amongst God's people today - are really from God? What would that mean for us as Christians? For our churches? Could we simply smile a bit about that nice - but surely absurd! -

thought, turn the page, cut onions, water the garden, go out in the evening, finally order that overhead projector and carry on with "church as we know it?"

### Cell - Congregation - Celebration

In Church Growth terminology we differentiate between three levels of church, 1. cell, 2. congregation and 3. celebration. I would very briefly like to explain what these terms mean.

The *cell* is typically house-based and sociologically small, between 3-20 people. Its purpose is relational fellowship, and it functions mostly organic, that is, members are often in direct contact with each other and therefore a natural part of each other's lives.

The *congregation* is sociologically of medium size, usually between 20 and 200, and functions more formal, organized, usually has a Pastor, co-workers, a type of worship service, and various programs. It often tries to serve a parish, and functions usually in a "sanctuary" of any type, a building specially used for religious purposes. Members do not have direct and natural contacts with each other, because the meeting is too large and not structured to allow for that.

The *celebration* is typically a large (200+) gathering of Christians of an area, expressing their unity in Christ, celebrating what God has done and will do for them, anticipating Christ's return, typically lead by Christians with apostolic and prophetic ministries. Celebrations can happen in the open air, in stadiums, conference centres or any other large area. People have no way of being in direct contact with all present, and are "happily lost in the crowd". In many places in history, the large city-cathedral have either tried or successfully managed to actually fulfill this function.

### The Small and the Large

Biblically we find two of those structures or levels, the cell and the celebration. In the New Testament we read of the church regularly meeting in houses, that is in "cell-sized units", and meeting in Solomon's Temple court, or in the open air, in big numbers.

Of those two, the cell, that is the house-based church, was the natural habitat, the normal and most common form of Christians getting together. Once the Jerusalem Temple was declared out of bounds for followers of "The Way", they kept on meeting in homes. When the celebration was not possible, the cell lived on.

The risen Christ strongly identified with the church in the houses, and did not urge them anywhere to form "Christian synagogues" or build religious buildings. When Saul was persecuting the churches and broke into homes to drag out Christians, Jesus asked him in his Damascus encounter: "*Saul, why do you persecute me?*"

During the first three centuries after Christ, church historians tell us that the housechurch was and remained the normal and natural way of Christians sharing their

new lives together. There will be a more detailed account of the housechurches throughout the ages in the next chapter, so I can be very brief here. Only after Emperor Constantine in the 4<sup>th</sup> century was there a radical shift in terms of church structure. The congregation-type church was introduced, the church became an audience, housechurches were marginalized and ultimately forbidden. No one could function as Christians privately, without the sanction of the state and its acknowledged and ordained "orthodox" church.

#### The mouse married the elephant

The result of these developments was a structural compromise, a marriage between the mouse (the cell) and the elephant (the celebration), giving birth to a most unusual creation, the congregational-type church. It was, in many ways, a strongly professionalized church, with priests fit for a king. It developed its own specialized buildings for religious purposes, removing church from everyday life into relics from the Old Testament religion, with priests, altars and heavily symbolic rituals, where most visitors were bound to become spectators, and could not really be participants any more. One of the few exemptions of this is the Orthodox Church, which tried to keep the structure of the extended family as much as possible.

As a result of this compromise the church lost two of its most powerful dynamics. The congregational church was basically an overgrown housechurch and an undergrown celebration, and therefore missed out on both very important aspects of the cell and the celebration. The cell provided family dynamics, a private and stable home and organic place of belonging and accountability to Christians, whereby the celebrations were places charged with a somewhat grandiose and truly public atmosphere, were the small housechurches reconnected with the big picture and each other, heard apostolic teaching and encountered prophetic vision. This often created an excited pull-effect drawing in more people on a public level, and such gatherings could literally shake a city or region, or, for that purpose, a village or small town.

#### Fellowship without fellowship

The congregational-type church with its semi-private atmosphere, its limited fellowship possibilities and its professional clergy was a political solution which suited the state and conveniently fitted into the religious "patterns of the world" at the same time. It was, in many ways, a triumph of the religious spirit, a return to the law and religious patterns of the Old Testament and even pagan religions, from which Jesus wanted to liberate mankind. Let me remind us that the problem is not the Old Testament at all. That is and remains a crucial part of God's revelation to mankind. The problem is carrying over Old Testament principles into New Testament times, ignoring the dynamic development of God's relationship to mankind, where He established the Kingdom of God over and beyond the ethnic focus on the people of Israel.

Since this new congregational structure was powerfully enforced by the state and church laws, it forced its content - the quality - to adapt to the new structure. In the New Testament, the content defined the form, that is, the quality defined the structure. Now this process was reversed, and the form molded the content, the structure defined the quality. One of the results was a hierarchical power-based structure of the church, with a king-like bishop or pope on top, down to the "lesser" ranks of the Church like the church warden and the organist.

This also meant that organic and natural Christian fellowship had to be adjusted and fit into a new container, the formal church building, and therefore had to be watered down to fill out the new bigger structure. Ultimately, fellowship was thinned out to almost homeopathic doses, and started to lose its impact on the Christians themselves as well as on society. The "fellowship without fellowship" was born.

#### The end of the Lord's Supper

Another victim of this process was "the Lord's Supper". Since it is quite difficult to feed a cathedral full of people with real food, it degenerated into a religious and symbolic ritual, offering microscopic sips of wine and a small wafer, often enough only to the "clergy" while the masses looked on in pious amazement. This meant that the "Lords Supper" was a supper no more, and lost its powerful meaning of a redeemed species doing the unheard of: people, irrespective of classes and caste, revolutionarily sharing real food with a prophetic meaning, having dinner with God, expecting his physical presence at any time just like after the resurrection. It thus became "the Eucharist", a pious and symbolic shell of the original meal of a tasty lamb that Jesus shared with his disciples. By AD 150 the eucharist and the love feast were two distinct parts of the Lord's Supper. Biblical commentator William Barclay says it like this: *"The celebration of the Lord's Supper in a Christian home in the first century and in a cathedral in the twentieth century cannot be more different, they bear no relationship to each other whatsoever."*

#### Did Procrustes work over the church?

It reminds me of the famous giant Procrustes in Greece, who forcefully made travelers between Athens and Corinth to lay down on his big bed, and if they were found too short for his bed, they were cruelly stretched with ropes to fill the length of the bed, breaking their bones in the process. If they ever happened to be too long, they were unceremoniously cut down to fit the bed also.

#### The structural lie

Today, 1700 years after the beginnings of those developments - it did not all happen in the 4<sup>th</sup> century! - , we have become so accustomed with the congregational-type church, that many find it hard to even imagine any other form of "real church life" or "worship services". Those historical events created a powerful system, a uniformed pattern, a sanctioned and later even sanctified structure, which has molded the



experiences and the mindset of people over long centuries, and has created a distorted picture of church that is not any more true to its original. This whole process canonized and institutionalized a devastating mediocrity, a middle-of-the-road-solution, simply functioning in religious and political correctness of the day. The congregational church became a "structural lie," because it paints the right message in the wrong colors, casts the right material in wrong forms, fills the water of life into contaminated bottles, takes the redeemed sinners and forms them into a harmless species of nice churchgoers and program participants. It makes heavenly promises, but does not deliver them on earth. It forgot to focus on the extended family as the building block of Christianity, and settled into occupying religious temples, more or less heavily ornated, reciting worship patterns in a small but solid haven of heaven on earth. No wonder that society in general followed the Church in this development - and started to loose the family focus, too.

In short, the congregational church became a self-defeating structure, standing in it's own way, hindering itself, creating the very problems it wants to solve, frustrating and breaking the hearts of millions of people who searched for God and found the congregational-type church, a caricature of God's supernatural family on earth. Only true spiritual heroes and outstanding characters were ever able to raise their head out of the contaminated bottles of this system and make a difference for some time, as we will see in the history chapter later on. But whatever they changed, whatever they pleaded for, whatever renewal, revival or reforms they proposed until this very day, was swallowed up soon enough by the unchanging system of Christendom, by the structure of church they did not dare to touch.

#### Five elements of a congregational-church

American veteran missionary and author Bill Beckham, in his book "The Second Reformation," describes a congregation- or, what he calls "cathedral-type" church like this: *"Since the time of Constantine in the Fourth Century the church has functioned primarily as a 'Cathedral'. At least five important elements are identified with this 'Cathedral' way of being the church:*

1. A Building (a 'Cathedral' or 'Church');
2. A Special Day (Sunday);
3. A professional leadership (priest, clergyman, holy man);
4. A special service, performed for the people (ceremonies, services, interpretation of dogma, motivation) and
5. A way to maintain itself (tithes and offerings).

*In spite of different types of church government, different architectural designs of buildings, different titles and clothes for leaders, different worship form, and different theologies, churches for the most part have functioned through this 'Cathedral' form. Whether Catholic or Baptist, Presbyterian or Pentecostal, 'High Church' or 'Low Church,' urban or rural, large or small, rich or poor, Western or Eastern, churches have been 'Cathedral' in nature. This 'Cathedral' system has survived political*

*upheavals, rearrangement of world maps, great social changes, theological heresies, the Protestant Reformation, and numerous movements. It's adaptability has been nothing short of amazing. Using a combination of the Roman governmental and feudal systems, Emperor Constantine developed a church structure that has lasted for seventeen centuries. The 'Cathedral' structure has had the capacity to absorb all major movements into its structure without changing its own basic form.*" As much as I agree, this does not notice the difference between the cathedral and the average congregational parish church. The cathedral basically reflects the temple in the Old Testament, while the congregational church reflects more the pattern of the Jewish synagogue. However, it is true that later on the Church tried to squeeze as much of a cathedral-type church into our average village parish-church, the congregational model of church, as I like to call it.

#### Principles, not procedures

I am not proposing to revitalize and re-invent the New Testament church straight out of the book of Acts, faithfully copying all its cultural forms and expressions, because we are living in different times and places. Our cities look much more like Corinth than Jerusalem; many countries live in a postmodern and post-Christendom era; however, we can and should learn from New Testament principles, without copying all its time-specific and cultural procedures; we should take the New Testament quality of church very seriously, but develop structures, methodologies and procedures for our own time and cultures and people groups.

#### From inherited to emerging mode

*"The West has compressed celebration into congregation, and forgotten the homes,"* says Rev. Bob Hopkins of the Anglican Church Planting Network in England, and goes on to ask: *"Is congregation the concrete in which our cultural concept of church is set?"* And, I might add, is this view captured by national pride and church culture? Europe now boasts of a strong residue of Christian history and structures, but the church has largely lost the people. That is why Anglican Robert Warren speaks of the *"inherited mode of church"* and an *"emerging mode"*, a new - or possible very old - form of church reemerging according to New Testament patterns.

In order to point out some of the differences between the congregational churches and the New Testament house churches, here is a selective list of key areas where they differ greatly. I am sure this list could be prolonged further:

	<b>Congregational Church</b>	<b>The New Testament Church</b>
• Place	meets in sanctuaries	moves from house to house
• Main functionaries	Pastors, Teachers Evangelists	Apostles, Prophets, Elders
• finances	tithes and offering	sharing all they have
• lifestyle	individual	community lifestyle
• Evangelism	outreach, action, programs, specialists	natural discipling of neighbors; multiplying itself
• battle cry	getting people into the church	getting the church into peoples homes
• Size	big, impersonal groups	small, intimate groups
• teaching style	static, sermon- centred	kinetic, discussion-style
• most important task of pastor	lead the church program; preach good sermons; housevisits etc.	equip each believer for doing the ministry themselves
• centre	worship service in a religious building	the ordinary house is the centre
• Keyword	become a member!	Go and make disciples!
• Ministry	performance oriented	equipping oriented
• Mission	sending specialized missionaries	church sends itself as a multipliable unit

#### Cell church, BEC, Housechurch

Today there are three main movements, each advocating in different ways a return to a "cell-based" housecentred church. Most of those movements would say: "You can do with cell and celebration, but the congregation is quite dispensable."

The three different streams are 1. The classic "Cell church" advocated for example by Ralph Neighbour, Bill Beckham, or Yonggi Cho. 2. The Base-Ecclesial Community, mostly within the Roman Catholic Church; and 3. the Housechurch Movement, maybe best known today from China and Vietnam.

While the cell church looks and sounds almost the same as the housechurch movement, it is not. There are very significant and vital differences, which I will point out later. The Base-Ecclesial Community is a long-lasting small group experiment within the Roman Catholic Church, and might very well develop into a cell church structure within that church. This book does not leave space to discuss this deeper, as my main intention here is to focus on generic housechurches.

### *Advantages of housechurches over traditional churches*

I am aware of at least twelve advantages of a cell-based housechurch movement over a traditional congregational-style church:

#### *1. Disciplined multiplication*

Housechurch is a model centred on multiplication and discipleship with huge growth potential, because the "cell" is the multipliable unit itself. Mentoring, multiplication and discipleship is the heart of the concept. Congregation is not by definition a discipleship model and structurally tends to prevent mentoring and discipleship. Discipleship never really is only "one-on-one", it is a function of community. Next to the Holy Spirit, peer pressure may be the strongest teacher on earth, as any parents of teenagers will agree. The housechurches allow for a redeemed use of peer pressure, living out a healthy and loving accountability with each other, learning a new kingdom value from each other and, being friends and family with each other, helping each other to be collective do-ers of a new paradigm, where no-one is left to individual and secret struggles, and therefore quickly matures.

#### *2. Persecution-proof structure*

Through its small and flexible way of life and its "persecution-proof spirit", housechurches can develop into an almost "persecution-proof structure", - or at least persecution-resistant! - as opposed to the very visible and immovable traditional "church with a cross on its steeple."

#### *3. Free from Church Growth barriers*

Once careful attention is given to prevent housechurches from moving from an organic to an organizational mode, housechurches can be multiplied through mitosis, an organic cell-reproduction process, and the overall growth of a movement is virtually free from "church growth barriers."

#### *4. Involves many more people more efficiently*

Congregations are often program based, where most programmes are organized at the congregational level. They have proven to be quite inefficient and resource hungry, usually involving 20% of exhausted members of the church doing the work for the other, more passive, 80%. In the housechurch, almost everyone can be easily and naturally involved, and "dead wood is cut out". Since involved people are fulfilled and therefore happy people, the overall quality - and efficiency - of the church grows.

*5. Breaks the pastoral care-dilemma*

The housechurch model breaks the pastoral care dilemma - a known and self-defeating problem of the congregational church: as numbers grow, the pastoral quality usually goes down, because the Pastor cannot tend to all his sheep any more.

*6. Provides a place of life transformation and accountability*

The housechurch is an ideal setting to change values, transfer life and therefore transform lifestyles. An analysis of the western church shows that the congregational model is almost totally ineffective at changing basic values and lifestyles. Many Christians end up with the same lifestyle of people around, and therefore become indistinguishable from society and lose their prophetic edge. Housechurches provide a place of radical transformation of values, reordering life, offering mutual and organic accountability, where even a redeemed peer pressure, "the most powerful teacher after Jesus himself", is made to function for good, and not for bad.

*7. The house is a most effective place for new Christians*

Much has been written about the inward looking mentality of the congregational church, whereby the church and its programs is the center, and everything else is rotating around this hub. This structure traditionally resents new people coming in, "messing up the order and the situation." The congregation is, statistically speaking, a most unfriendly zone for new Christians, also accounting for unbelievable large drop-out rates of up to 99% in so-called "evangelistic-follow-up programs". In contrast, the "cell" or housechurch is a most effective, natural and welcoming zone for new people to come and stay in touch with the Christian community. It provides spiritual fathers and mothers, not teachers and paper. It also reverses the general direction of the perspective of Christians: instead of getting people to the church, they are getting the church to the people.

*8. Solves the leadership crisis*

Housechurches are led by elders, and they are just that: older than most, without necessarily being "elderly". Elders do not have to be skilled Masters of Ceremony and learned teachers, but modest and authentic fathers and mothers with obedient children will do nicely to start with. They are by then already many years into living a maturing life and passing the test of time, not freshlings from a seminary able to perform some religious functions. This leadership is easy to find and develop anywhere without time-consuming schools for religious specialists. It depends on initial and ongoing apostolic and prophetic input and support, ministries, which in themselves can be multiplied and therefore match and grow exponentially with a multiplying housechurch movement. Traditional Sunday- or Bible Schools and seminaries are mostly static and addition-based leadership development systems which grow linear, at best. They are an informational system, not a transformational

system, as Beckham rightly points out. Therefore they cannot match a multiplying movement of housechurches with an exponentially growing need for elders.

#### *9. Overcomes the clergy-laity division*

*"Nowhere in the New Testament do we find references to a pastor leading a congregation"*, says Barney Coombes. The housechurch does not need a Pastor in the traditional sense at all, because elders, functioning together with the corporate giftedness of the housechurch to maintain and multiply the life of the church. This therefore breaks the curse of the clergy-laity division, which the congregational system reinforces.

#### *10. It is more biblical*

We cannot afford to ignore biblical revelation for too long and get away with it. Tradition is a strong teacher, but God's word is more reliable and simply better. Even in an age of Postmodernism and relativity, the Bible still teaches absolutes. However, the Bible absolutely does not teach us to call a holy crowd gathering on a holy day at a holy hour in a holy sanctuary to participate in a holy ritual performed by holy men in holy clothes against a holy fee to be the New Testament church. God's work done God's way still attracts God's blessing. Even in Moses' time God exhorted him to build "according to the pattern". It is worth to struggle even with our own trusted tradition for the purpose of regaining biblical truth, because it is not tradition which sets us free, but the truth of God's word.

#### *11. Undeniably cheaper*

The congregational church can be defined as "plot plus building plus priest plus salary plus programmes". The housechurch is "people plus ordinary houses plus faith plus shared life", which is undeniably cheaper. As congregational-type churches cost enormous sums of money to establish them, and more money to maintain or even propagate the system, the cells and housechurches literally make money, because they produce more than they consume. In an age where there seems to be an endless battle cry for more money for "the church work", we should not overlook alternatives and be good stewards of God's financial talents he gives us.

#### *12. It resurrects the City church*

The church in the New Testament was named according to its location, not denomination. With a new wave of housechurches, this also opens up a way back to the "city church," literally the Church of the city, all Christians of a city or region together, meeting regularly or irregularly in city-wide celebrations, were the cities most gifted Christians and humble servants of the Lamb forget all the titles and politics, and in a new maturity sacrifice their own name, denominationalism, reputation and single-handed success to the single advancement of the Kingdom of

only one King, the Lamb of God. Imagine the thrill of the public when this collective city-based and authentic leadership regularly casts prophetic vision, teaches apostolic standards, stands united, blesses each other and speaks to the world with one voice. What the devil has tried hard to prevent at any cost will again come true: that "the Romans," "the Ephesians," "the Corinthians," "the Church of Jerusalem", Vienna, Singapore, Baghdad, Khartoum or Montevideo will reconnect with each other, form itself into one supernatural corporate identity and movement under one single lord and master, and speak with a collective and powerful voice to their city and nation. What happens at the small level of housechurches will eventually spill over on a larger city-scale, where the church will "excel at the small and therefore excel at the large". Instead of Christians being regularly excited top-down through imported motivators and speakers at artificial conferences based on names and topics, the healthy, authentic and infectious joy and excitement at the houselevel will bubble up and express itself citywide, where no one can overhear it any more, and people will repeat the statement made first in Jerusalem: "You have filled our city with your teaching!" And if ever God should choose to repeat instances like at Pentecost, where 120 upper room Christians suddenly face the challenge to accommodate 3.000 converts in one day, they would be prepared, because the flexible structure of multiplying housechurches would already be in place.

In many areas of the world, local and regional pastoral fellowships and prayer networks are emerging. I believe this can be the beginning of a regional process, a spirit-led, intuitive and slow convergence of people with likeminded spirits, which creates healthy relationships first, which leads to the formation of a collective spiritual identity, a vessel of unity, into which at a special kairos-point in history a greater challenge can be placed: together taking on the challenge of discipling our city or region - together!

## 2. Housechurches in History

*Rediscovery through the valley of the Dark Ages*

The New Testament church was a growing church, says Dr. Alan Kreider, and from history we know that it kept growing for quite some time. According to an Epistle to Diognetus written in the late second-century "Christians, day by day increase more and more." In the middle of the third century Origen exclaimed: "Multitudes of people are coming to faith". Ramsay MacMullen, ancient historian in Yale, has estimated that in each generation some 500.000 people were added to the church up until the conversion of Emperor Constantine in AD 312, until the church finally made up between 5 and 8 percent of the population of the Roman empire.

### Multiplying housechurches

The Christians during the New Testament times and immediately after that were literally meeting in house churches, usually in the largest rooms of its members. Church Historians agree that they could have rarely been more than fifteen or twenty people. Once a housechurch grew bigger than that, it usually multiplied by simply starting another housechurch nearby. If not, this growth immediately caused problems. Origen, preaching in a home in Ceasarea, once complained that "some have hidden in remotest corners of the house to occupy themselves with profane stories."

### Join the candidates for death

Although Christians were not constantly persecuted, and times of relative freedom was interwoven with subtle or fierce persecutions, every Christian knew that persecution could break out at any moment, due to a local crisis, an imperial edict, or a "wolf" that had penetrated the lambs as a lying informer like Judas, about to betray the followers of Christ to the Herods of the day. This was what Paul calls "the fellowship of the sufferings of Christ", as he writes from his prison cell to the Philippians (Phil 3:10). Tertullian writes: "We are besieged and attacked, they kept us prisoners in our own secret congregations." Every Christian was, by definition, a candidate for death. If one wanted a soft life, or go ahead in respectable circles, one simply did not become a Christian. When a Christian, under pressure or interrogation, simply affirmed: "I am a Christian!", it had a powerful ring of authority to it. The power to face persecution, however, came for many Christians from a vivid vision of the future, the living expectation of the imminent return of the Messiah. People knew that this person was ready to die for this statement, and that caused awe or consternation. Persecution was so much part of the lives of the Early Christians, that it molded their thinking - and their structure! In a separate chapter further down, "The Persecution proof church", I will discuss this further.



### History: more than propaganda written by the victors

There are two ways to read the Bible: we can read our experiences into it, and search for "confirmations" from the Bible to underline what we already "knew"; or we can read the Bible even against our experiences, which can be substantially more painful - but liberating in the process. The same way we can approach history. Either history will be, as a common communist slogan says, simply "propaganda written by the victors," an interpretation of history to fit and justify the present rule or Status Quo; or history becomes the science to truly discover the facts of the past, even if they do not seem to fit the picture we have of our own history.

If we now look for reasons for the multiplying and growing housechurch movements in the New Testament and the first few centuries, we might be surprised to miss what we expect to be there, and startled to find some quite different dynamics.

### No Evangelism

A case in point is Evangelism. If we are convinced, for example, that "Evangelism" is what we all need to do, we will soon start to see Evangelism literally on every page of the Bible, even if it is not there at all. Except for Philip (Acts 9) and the five-fold ministry (Eph. 4:11) there is almost no mentioning of "Evangelists" or "Evangelism as we know it" in the New Testament and the records of the Early Church at all. Alan Kreider speaks of a "telling silence of encouragement to 'evangelize'". The New Testament does not speak about evangelizing as a "plain preaching activity," and Jesus seems to be, in fact, outspoken against going "door to door" (Luke 10), a very common "evangelistic method" in some countries. There is, however, much emphasis on the "making of disciples". Arthur Darby Nock says that in the history of the Early Church "there was little, if any, direct preaching to the public masses; it was simply too dangerous." The church not only had a message, it was the message. And because the church in itself was "good news", there simply was no need for proclamation style Evangelism or going door to door. Only when the church as a structure became "bad news", an ill-matching structure for an explosive message, did the need for special "good-news"-enterprises emerge. Evangelism without a functioning church model is Evangelism *because of the lack of a working church model*, which provides literally out-of-body experiences and even out-of-body conversions.

Many historians therefore disagree with English writer Michael Green, who states in his otherwise excellent book "Evangelism in the Early Church: *There can be no doubt that ... open air evangelism continued through the first two centuries*". The pagan Caecilius, a contemporary of the early church, reported that Christians were *"silent in public, but chattering in corners."* This also meant that in times of illness or crisis their neighbors, who have learned to trust them, would feel free to turn to Christians for help. Baptist Mission Professor John Mark Terry, in his book "Evangelism, a concise history", reflecting the thinking of our present time, sees Evangelism as something *do-able*, then re-interprets the Bible and history from that perspective and goes on record to say: *"Wherever Jesus went, he presented the gospel."* The evangelism-worldview Terry describes is full of "evangelistic

keywords” and methodology: touching, witnessing, sharing, ministering, preaching, telling the good news, and doing Evangelism; he even goes as far to say that “Jesus was using a number of different evangelistic methods”. We need to be careful not to reinterpret Church history through the reading glasses of present styles and methods of “Evangelism”. Jesus, as well as His Body, the Church, did not only have a message, He *was* the message. He did not have the gospel, *He was the gospel*. The gospel is not a set of doctrines, but a redeemed lifestyle reflecting God’s qualities. What the early Christians did was not “life-style evangelism” true to a proven method, but their normal everyday life had powerful in-built evangelistic implications, true to a loving and compassionate God.

#### No Missions

Georg Kretschmar points out, that “*the recruitment to faith was never institutionalized, there was no organizing the congregation for missions.*” The impact of the church as an entity was so strong, that most early Christians did not even pray for the conversions of pagans, but, according to Yves Congar, a Dominican scholar, they prayed for the prosperity and peace of the people. There is, says Norbert Brox, an “*astonishing absence of thinking and talking about missions.*” The reason for this “absence” is very much the same as for the “absence” of Evangelism: the church in itself was the mission. The “Missions Journeys” of Paul and his companions were not understood as “Missions as we know it” by Paul himself, but emerged as titles in the appendix of Bibles to handdrawn maps of the Mediterranean centuries later. Paul was simply doing apostolic and prophetic ministry, and so was the church that had been planted and emerged through these ministries. Since the *church was the mission*, it did not so much send out special “missionaries” - it literally sent out itself, in the form of multipliable units, by sending out embryonic units of a local church of two and three, which carry within themselves the vision and virus of church, ready to infect whatever they touch.

#### No attractive worship services

Although the church in Corinth was still open to outsiders, from the mid-first century onwards pagans were usually neither admitted to Christian meetings nor invited at all. After the persecution under Nero in the 60s of the first century, most Churches closed their doors to outsiders. One of the functions of the deacons even seemed to have been that of an “ecclesiastical bouncer”, the typically heavy set person who in today’s world stands at the door of private clubs and bars to evict, if necessary by force, unwanted elements. They had to screen the wolves from the lambs, as the “Testament of our Lord”, a mid-fourth century document describing the functions of the deacons, explains. Paul was warning the Galatians against “*false brothers, sneaking in to spy out our liberty in Christ*” (Gal 2:4). The fellowship meetings of the Christians were not meant at all to be attractive for outsiders, because they were not designed for them. Mid-third century Bishop Cyprian in Carthage compared the church with the “enclosed garden” of Songs of Solomon (4:12). Even a catechumen, someone in daily

Bible training under an instructor/teacher was firmly dismissed before the Christians did their secret rites, the prayers, the Holy Kiss, baptisms and the Lord's Supper. The Christians were very much what Celsus, a critic of the early church, called a "secret society."

Worship in the New Testament is never mentioned to be the reason Christians gather together, and surely not consisting in singing a number of songs. It is an obedient and sacrificial lifestyle of a person which, yes, sometimes does sing, but does this because the whole life is living worship. Abraham knew this well, and as he went up to Mount Morija to sacrifice his only son Isaak, he told to the waiting servants that he is going up "to worship" (Gen 22).

#### No mainstream

Christians in the early centuries often called themselves "paroikoi" (1. Peter 2:11), resident aliens, or "the alien next door". The understanding they had of themselves was not to be settlers and dutiful citizens with a special religious persuasion, but to be "a colony of aliens", at home everywhere, fully at home nowhere. When people became Christians they were "*converted to marginality*", as Brazilian Eduardo Hoornaert said. Rather than being part of the main social establishment they were part of a "counter-culture", an anti-society, secret and mysterious to many, loyal to "another king", a distinctively different spiritual tribe. Paul describes himself to Felix: "*I admit that I am a follower of The Way, which they call a sect*" (Acts 24:14), and was known as the "*ringleader of a sect, a troublemaker*" (24:5).

#### How and why, then, did people become Christians?

If it was not for systematic evangelistic programmes, mission outreach and invitations to attractive worship services, how did people become Christians? And if becoming a Christian meant to join an outcast and secretive society, endanger their social success and potentially end up as a candidate for death, why did people want to become Christians?

As we will now look at some of the historic reasons for large numbers of people who decided to join the church then, we might find clues to similar developments now. Again we should not fall into the trap and copy historic methodologies and procedures from another time and space 1:1, but learn from the underlying principles and be highly creative and flexible in their outworking in today's cultures and people groups.

Beyond the fact that Christians lived in organic and easily multipliable housechurches, equipped and guided by the five-fold ministry (Eph. 4:11), some of the main reasons for people becoming Christians in ancient times, according to numerous historic studies done by Alan Kreider and others, include:

## 1. Curiosity

Quite opposite to many of today's churches which are trying to be attractive to the world, welcome visitors with sweets and visitors cards, display signs at the entrance reading "Everybody welcome!", have outreach campaigns of any size and type, focussed on getting outsiders to come to church, and are generally trying to be at least seeker sensitive or even seeker driven, the early churches worked on very different dynamics. One of them was the unsatiated curiosity of people. People are by nature adventurous and curious, seeking "to go where no one has gone before". Many today wonder why the occult movements and secret circles and societies like the Freemasons are still flourishing. The answer is: they appeal to man's basic instinct to be a tribal being, with the strong need to be part of an exclusive family, group and tribe, for which humans are ready to undergo almost any sort of initiation process. Jesus knew this, and had something like a dual communication style, one for those "inside", and another for those "outside", "Jesus spoke to the multitudes in parables, and He did not speak to them without a parable." (Mt 13:34). This pattern seems to continue in the church: preaching was for those outside, teaching for those inside the church. Jesus was very firm on this dual pattern: *"To you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God, but to the rest it is in parables, in order that seeing they may not see, and hearing they may not understand"* (Luke 8:10). Even his words about the "narrow gate" created a powerful curiosity and an almost feverish excitement amongst many to know the mysterious message and movement of Jesus. Do they know something we do not know? Jesus knew that the "Mystery of the Gospel" is not like *"pearls thrown before the pigs"*, but duly discovered, sought out, and only then found, quite by revelation.

People were not admitted to freely enter churches, and it only sparked and heightened their interest. If I tell my four-year old son not to open that drawer under any circumstance once I leave the room, I prophetically know, which place he is almost magically and irresistibly drawn once I go out: that very forbidden drawer.

Today we are sometimes in the danger of pressing home answers to people who have not even asked the right questions, and prevent people from truly becoming curious. Jesus described himself as the Water of Life, and the disciples as the salt of the earth. If someone eats salt, it will make him thirsty, even when he has not been thirsty before. The dynamics behind it is this: If people are not thirsty for the Water of Life yet, feed them salt. Then they will become thirsty, and then they will drink.

## 2. Steadfastness in persecution and martyrdom

The first time that many people in the first centuries actually saw a "life-Christian" was when they saw one die. Many Christians were crucified, attacked by wild beasts, roasted on chairs of molten iron, or just burnt. Their humble and patient and often enough joyful endurance of those dreadful torments was

medically inexplicable; their love for each other, giving each other the kiss of peace, a revolutionary sign of an obvious secret society before they were killed, was transparent. Those who guarded the Christians on their way to their executions often said: "There is a power among them!" and the fact that they were ready to die for their belief made many secretly wish they had something so powerful to believe in. As a result, more people were fascinated, their curiosity level rose even more - and were attracted to the church. Many have repeated the true statement that "the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church." A Christianity which has something to die for has a powerful attraction for the living.

### 3. Exorcism

When Jesus exercised authority over evil spirits and then told his disciples to "drive out demons" (Mt. 10:8), his early followers listened carefully - and did as they were told. In the early centuries, described by many as "an age of bondage, life-disfiguring addictions and compulsions," - which does not seem to be much different from today - the freedom and fullness of life in Christ could not remain hidden for long. As one spokesman for many, Irenaeus pointed to the "evangelistic" function of exorcism: "Those who have been cleansed often both believe in Christ and join themselves to the Church". In an age of competitive miracle working, the Christian God and this powerful "spiritual detoxification" in the name of Jesus seemed stronger and more profound than the influence of other gods. Catechist Justin of Rome, writing about 150, described how Christians helped other people almost systematically to renounce demons and see them being liberated from spiritual oppression mainly in four key areas: unlawful sex, the secret and magic arts, escalating private wealth, and violent xenophobia, the hate of foreigners.

The early Christians would have seen people practicing illicit sex outside of marriage; someone accumulating material wealth just for his personal gain; somebody involved in occultism, and those being rough and violent to foreigners and strangers as demonically bound, persons who needs the help of Jesus to be released from those overpowering spiritual forces beyond any known human control. As the church stopped focussing on these ministries in later centuries, they left a gaping vacuum, which might need to be filled again by the only organism on earth called and gifted to do so, the church.

### 4. They had found the Way to live

Christians believed they were God's instrument of a new world, and not only had they found the right reason and way to die, they had also found the right way to live. Before they were called Christians, they were called followers of The Way for two reasons: Jesus had said "I am the Way," and they had obviously found the way to live. *The way they organized and structured their life was called the church.* When a Christian whispered to a pagan he knew: "I have found the way

*to live!*”, it was not offensive, but intriguing and quite attractive in an age where people were aware that things are somehow going wrong with them. In addition to that, Christians had a communal lifestyle, socially inclusive like no other group in ancient history. They shared material blessings out of a common fund with everyone in need. They even used to pick up discarded babies left to die on the local garbage dumps, and raised them as their own, or volunteered to nurse victims of the plague, endangering their own lives, much to the dumbfounding of their contemporaries. In the eyes of a materialistic society, they were either crazy or holy. They were approachable and trusted friends and counselors for anyone. This was true specially for the women, maybe because of their ability to listen to people and be attentive to their questions. Augustine wrote quite embarrassed to a group of men: *”Oh you men, you are easily beaten by your women. It is their presence in great numbers that causes the church to grow.”* The Christians were aware that the life of their *”free communities”* was remarkable. It is the *”Beauty of life that causes strangers to join the ranks”*, one of them wrote. They could self-consciously say: *”We do not talk about great things, we live them.”* That is also why the early leaders of the churches gave much attention to maintain the quality of fellowship, love and relationship amongst each other, because they knew that this is one of the main reasons for people being drawn to Christ and being saved.

##### **5. The teachings and person of Jesus**

A modern day Christian leader from Africa once exclaimed about the Christian missionaries he knew: *”They came to preach the gospel to us, but they did not show us how to live!”* Many early Christians were convinced, *”that conversion began not so much at the level of belief than at the level of lifestyle”*, says Kreider. Only a person who was willing to change his life was ready for the gospel. That is also the reason why, one of the most compelling dynamics of people being drawn to the church was the person and teaching of Jesus himself. His *”sermon on the Mount”* was not so much understood as a sermon or moral dream, but as a set of Godly ethics, a heavenly guide to live by. Pagans of all ages were powerfully drawn to Jesus and his sayings. No other teaching of Jesus was more often repeated than the command to love the enemies. These words, many held, were so wonderful that they made you either laugh or cry. *The church did not preach itself, it preached Christ by promoting his teaching and by living his lifestyle.*

##### **The derailing of the church**

The New Testament Church has been mostly an organic, relational, spiritual family, multiplying itself. But even before his death, Jesus warned his disciples of deception, false prophets, false Christs, who all have one common purpose: to deceive and to derail the elect. It is natural for all of us to think of this deception to be a part of a terrible future, and to happen to *”all the others”*, but not us. However, Paul, Peter, and

Jude all warn, of the immediate coming of ungodly men, false teachers and false prophets, disguising as angels from heaven. They did not mince words: they even cursed those who will do this in advance (Gal 1:8-10; 2 Pet 2:1-2; Jude 1:3-6).

I entertain a daunting realization that this deception may have already happened in global proportions through what has been coined "Christendom," the derailed caricature and doomed version of Christianity. Maybe the worst of what Christ has predicted is yet to come, and we need to be prepared for a worst possible scenario. But this also means that today we may simply stand on the apogee of many already derailed and now institutionalized developments. Even if we want to be true children of our mother churches, we will therefore automatically become part of traditional movements which may have departed long ago from other movements that themselves have departed from some derailed movements in the past. If the river has once found it's bed, it is very difficult to change it's course. However, our first allegiance as Christians is with the God of the future, not with the history of the past. Rick Joyner, a prophetic teacher from the USA, said it this way: many need to realize, that they do not need to be born by the mother (church), but truly be born of the Father in heaven himself.

Why were the Dark Ages dark?

"I am the light of the World," says Jesus. To darken the Light of the world means to darken the world. And dark, the world did become. If there ever was a derailing of the Church, it is worth to go back a few steps in history and have a look at some of these ecclesiological accidents. How did it happen?

A silent revolution

Church historians agree that it may have begun with challenging and changing the apostolic teaching on repentance, holiness and sin, baptisms and the Godhead itself. One of the first attempts at inventing the nonscriptural distinction between "clergy and laity" was made by the Nicolaites, a group that emphasized the difference between the "listening lay people and the ministering brothers". They go back to Nicolas, who was one of the first seven church deacons (Acts 6:5), later influenced by Greek Dualism, who then goes on to develop the doctrine of "the Nicolaites" (Rev 2:6), which the risen Christ says "he hates." Nicolait in Greek is composed of two words. *Nikao* means conquer, to be above others, and *laos* means common people. "A Nicolait is someone conquering the common people, climbing above the laity", says Watchman Nee in his book "The Orthodoxy of the Church". "The conduct of climbing over and above the common believers as a mediatorial class is what the Lord detests and hates". The concept of a special clergy cast are already evident in the two letters of Clement of Rome (ca. AD 100) and the elevation of the bishop to be the autocratic head of the local church in the letters of Ignatius of Antioch/Syria (ca. 110-117).

Then there was the aspect of the reintroduction of two powerful forces to Christianity: moralism and religion. The one introduced a set of behavioral patterns, a group of laws to live by; the other may have started with the crucifix, starting to "cross oneself" and ward off some evil spirit through this practice. It may have been a few "harmless" waxcandles there and some burnt-incense here, but it is not harmless at all. It drew back Christianity into the religious "patterns of the world", complete with idols, charms, religious rites, priests.

From then on it was a quick and constant succession of derailments from the original teachings of Jesus and the Apostles: Early "innovations" were the veneration of the usually martyred Saints, and the separation of the Lords Supper as a meaningful and prophetic way to eat together in the presence of Christ into a "love or agape feast" and "the eucharist", a social potluck-type dinner and a religious and highly symbolic function. In the second half of the first century documents like the Didache and the Canon of Hippolytus show that the Lord's Suppers was not "attached" to a meal, *it was a meal*, says *Peter. H. Davis* in his article "The Church in the House". Very soon, however, the "love-feast" became purely social and was abandoned, whereby the Eucharist in it's symbolic form - without "real food" - became the accepted way to celebrate the Lords Supper.

### Based on fear, not faith

True stewards and spiritual fathers in the Kingdom of God where and are equipped with this supernatural gift of faith that allows them to truly believe that God is still in control, even if they are not. They are able to live this healthy tension of uncertainty and unpredictability of what will happen next in the relationship of God and His people, because their strength is not to understand everything, but to have a strong trust in God. Early on, the Church started to give in to the pressure for security. Around the year 150, for example, "Scholastic Theology" was introduced, as a system to interpret the scriptures and defend it against heresies like the Gnosis. Very soon the defensive system became more important than the message it defended. Early charismatic movements like Montanism created more problems, because some of its adherents where not easy to control and started to build fractions in the Church and pull people towards individual charismatic leaders. In order to defend the truth and the Church against this, the Church strongly focussed on dogma and creed, and tightly observed who was able and allowed to do ministry, and who not. In short, it tried to exert greater control, in order to avoid more damage. The motivation was good, but the method was not. Control is the natural development of a lack of trust, of fear, the opposite of faith, and leads people to build a system in order to make sure that nothing can go wrong, or at least to minimize danger and apostasy. As a result, the church focusses more on "safe" rituals, "right" formulas and "approved" liturgies and tries to become water-tight as well as fool proof. What developed as a byproduct of this was, that the Church quickly fell into the hands of enthusiastic theological watchdogs, policemen of the faith and a new version of "bishops", king-like figures who where not any more the most humble servants and plain down-to earth elders, but



impressive figureheads and religious prime ministers with an aura of awe-inspiring authority in order to keep the flock together and the problems outside. Again, a human Saul replaced God as the real king of the people of God.

These spiritual "kings" were able, in the power of the charismatic personality they commanded, to alter doctrines and introduce any amount of personal and subjective interpretations as a new teaching, a new dogma, and much of the Church went with it. As early as 220 AD, Origen introduces the doctrine of infant baptism in Alexandria, which, by 416 AD became not only compulsory in the Western churchworld, but remained the church's main way of "evangelism" and initiating the general population into the church system, a practice that can be likened to selling spiritual insurance for the afterlife to biblically ignorant, but religious and pious parents who fear for their children and simply had to trust the religious specialists of the day.

#### The professionalizing of the church under Constantine

When Emperor Constantine converted to Christianity (312) and made Christianity in his Edict of Milan a State-religion, Christians, tired of centuries of persecution, celebrated him as a savior, relaxed - and experienced probably the biggest single derailment in history. During this time the church was heavily professionalized, were approved and "licensed" Priests conducted weddings and other functions in a more and more professional public matter, and the church experienced the doubtful blessing to be equipped with a mediatorial caste between itself and God. The church needed to be "fit for the King" and his company, and that also meant cathedrals, not shabby houses. Through this, the great divide between clergy and laity not only emerged, it was sanctioned, institutionalized and sealed and protected by the State, an error that was costing the lives of millions of martyrs until today, who have been killed at the hand of political soldiers, instigated by "properly organized and registered" advocates of Christendom.

The church had gladly accepted national graduation from a persecuted cult to a State-prescribed religion, and lost its prophetic power over social, cultural and pagan habits in the process, because it was from now on married to the system that granted and protected all of it. The church lost its identity as a prophetic counter-culture, supernaturally different from the patterns of this world, and became a celebrated insider. As a result, both the State and the Church were trapped. The state lost its' direction because it had swallowed the beacon and the compass, and the church became drunk with political power.

#### Forbidding the housechurch

In all these developments, a very significant one stands out: Bishops Theodosius and Gratian (380) ordered that there should be only one state-recognized Orthodox church and one set of faith - the orthodox dogma. Each Roman citizen was forced to be a member and should be made to believe in the "lex fidei," the law of faith. Other groups and movements - including those meeting in homes - were forbidden. That

meant the legal end of the housechurch. The law turned the rules upside down. Once, church buildings were not even allowed by the government until the rule of Severus around AD 222-235, and housechurches were the only way for Christians to meet. But from now on, to start a housechurch meant breaking the law and becoming a criminal. This started a new era: the persecution of the church in the name of the "church."

#### Reviving synagogue-style worship patterns

Just as the Jewish *Mishnah* allowed ten male Jews to form a synagogue, Christians have inherited their pattern of worship from the Jewish synagogues, not the temple, says *Dr. Met Castillo*. Rabinowitz has found five elements in synagogue worship: Invitation to worship with hymns and a formal call to worship; prayers and petitions; scripture lessons; an address based on the scripture lessons; conclusion with benedictions. As the Christian worship became more and more formal in christian church-houses rather than house-churches after the time of Constantine, the basic Jewish synagogue-pattern was revived and thus inherited, with the addition of saying the creed. This made the church fall back into legalistic and ritualistic patterns of worship which would remain almost unchanged for the next centuries and became the sacrosanct and agreed upon style of meetings for Christians.

#### Priscillians movement

Priscillian was a Spanish nobleman who, already in the 4<sup>th</sup> century, immediately revolted against the State-and Priest-religion. This man, on fire for God, "initiated a large lay movement in Spain and France; even many priests and bishops joined in. They started small fellowships they called brotherhoods, where, only converted and baptized Christians could take part of their simple meetings in ordinary houses. That was too much for orthodox church to take: Priscillian and six of his friends were killed in Trier", says Ch. Babut, who studied this movement. In this they became a forerunner of many similar reformation movements like the Bogomilians, Petrobusians, Patarenians, Waldensians, Lollards and others.

#### The Celts

No rule is without exception, and even the Dark Ages produced some of the most marvelous theological works or Christian movements of all times. One of the oftentimes overlooked fact of history is that it was not really the Roman Catholic Church that converted Europe, but the Celts, an original barbaric and later Christian people group related to the Galatians of Asia Minor and the French Gaules, spreading from the Upper Danube region down to Portugal and then later over to England and Ireland. They not only produced powerful apostles like Patrick of Ireland, who was initiating one of the most strategic nationwide churchplanting movement of all times, but also sent apostles like Gallus to countries like Switzerland or Boniface to Germany. Between the 6<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> century the Celts have gradually been taken over by

the papal doctrines and values of the Roman Catholic Church, often enough with political force. Nevertheless, the Celts have dug many wells of fresh spiritual waters nurturing the lands of Europe. And since those wells have become filled with rubbish and the sand of history, it might be well worth cleaning them up and redigging those wells for the future of Europe, suggest *Roger Ellis* and *Chris Seaton* in their book "The New Celts".

#### The road to the bottom

But these were the exceptions in the first few hundred centuries, the spiritual rule of the day was less enchanting. Far gone were the times, when the train of Christianity was running on safe prophetic and apostolic tracks right on target. From here on the road into the wilderness continued. It was a time which corresponds in some ways greatly to today's spiritual anarchy in some countries, where, people in practice basically believed anything - as long as it was not in the Bible. Forgotten were the words of Jesus, "let the dead bury the dead," and the church proudly engaged in opening graveyards close by the "holy" church building, where people felt they were safe from the monsters and dragons of the depth, fuelled by the naive and religious belief that God dwells in Church buildings in a special way. The Council of Ephesus (431) proclaimed the worship of Mary as the mother of God. Leo the Great pronounced himself Bishop of Rome (440), and Cesar Valentinian (445) confirmed his position as the spiritual leader of the whole Western Empire. Around 500 the priesthood started to observe a common dress code. With Justinian (527-565) the church became truly a State-ordained church: all priest became public servants. As early as 607, after the fall of the Roman Empire, Boniface III was the first bishop to adopt the name Pope in the Roman Catholic Church. Before that, this title (Pontifex maximus - Latin for big bridgebuilder) was used by the Emperors of Rome to describe themselves as high priests and Gods of the Roman Empire. Some further steps down into spiritual darkness were:

- 709 Kissing the Pope's foot begins
- 786 Worship of images and relics develops
- 850 Use of holy water begins
- 995 Canonization of dead Saints
- 998 Fasting on Fridays and before Lent
- 1079 Celibacy of the priesthood instituted
- 1090 Prayer beads adopted from several pagan religious systems
- 1184 The Inquisition, the policing of the faith, begins: millions of Jews and witches (and later, after the Reformation, Protestant believers) will die at the hands of the Church of Rome alone before it ends. It is officially established by Pope Innocence IV in 1252. The Reformation Churches joined later in the same spirit
- 1190 The sale of indulgences - forgiveness of sins against payment of money- is instituted
- 1215 Transubstantiation of the wafer and wine: these elements supernaturally change into the Body and Blood of Jesus at the incantation of the Priest
- 1229 Bible as a book too holy to read was forbidden to laymen

- 1414 Communion cup was forbidden to lay people
- 1439 Doctrine of Purgatory decreed
- 1439 Dogma of sacraments affirmed
- 1545 Tradition granted equal authority with the Bible (Council of Trent)

### The Inquisition

As a mere political consequence of the decision already taken under Gratian and Theodosius in AD 380, the Inquisition, a religious-political joint venture in the form of a Christian "faith police", lifted its bloody head, killing millions of Protestants at the hands of Catholics, and so-called "Anabaptists" at the hand of Protestants. After defeating the Islamic Kingdom in Granada 1492, the Inquisition found yet another group to hunt: the Moriscos, Islamic Maures which had converted to Christianity. Persecuted and killed by almost everyone were the Jews, seen as the "murderers of God".

Only as late as 22 January, 1998 did the Vatican, under the leadership of German Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, open its extensive archives on the Inquisition in the Palazzo del Sant'Uffizio in Rome, where the bloody business of systematically persecuting and killing heretics is documented in no less than 4.500 large volumes. "We are concerned about the truth, and this is an act of selfcleansing", says Cardinal Achille Silvestrini. It is believed however, that those 4.500 volumes represent much less than a third of the original material, which got lost.

"The Inquisition sniffed with dedication after anyone who only faintly smelled a heretic", says the German Magazine SPIEGEL (23/1998) in a report. Any dangerous written material was immediately put on the "Index Additus Librorum Prohibitum", the black list of forbidden books, and burnt, wherever possible. The Inquisition was especially cruel in Spain, where as late as 1826, 18 years after Joseph Bonaparte, a brother of Napoleon, declared the Inquisition illegal in 1808, the last "heretic" was hanged in Valencia. This religious persecution went hand in hand with the proverbial witch-hunt, and we could imagine Satan's glee to also see biblically converted women and housechurch leaders being put to the stake by the church in the name of witchcraft. Equally cruel and heartless was the Inquisition in Germany. When, for example, Reformer Jan Hus died in German Konstanz on the stake, (1415), the "Fathers of the Council" simply laughed.

### The reformation

Luther, in Worms (1521), said some unbelievable and unheard of words for the ears of his contemporaries: *"I do not believe the Pope and the Church Councils. It is a fact that they erred often. I am a captive of the Word of God!"* The monk Martin Luther, more than 1.100 years after the first energetic wave of housechurches had died down, was able to rediscover the heartbeat of the gospel, salvation by faith and grace, and the centrality of Scripture. His discovery, in effect, was like a bombshell in the night.

### The history of rediscovery

Other reformers like Zwingli, Melancton, Calvin, John Knox and others started to encourage the translation and use of the Bible by the common man, and the Bible was translated from Latin - the language of the professional clergy - into 14 popular initial languages, and reached 40 translations by the year 1.600. If it was possible for the very essence of the Gospel - salvation by faith, justification by grace, to be buried under the sand of history, what about the rest? If we can gravely err in the very key and core issues, could we have erred in other, lesser issues, also? The fact that the Bible was again given into the hands of common people started what I call the history of rediscovery, the turning point, where the church started to again climb out from darkness, escape it's own structural prison, and rediscover step by step long forgotten truth and long forgotten practices, which includes the housechurch.

### Martin Luther's "Third order of service"

In Luther's "Vorrede zur Deutschen Messe" (The German Mass and Order of Service), published in 1526, he distinguishes three "orders of services": the Latin Mass, a public meeting for all in Latin, which Luther specially designed for the young people (Latin was the cosmopolitan language, the "English" of that time; the German Mass, a second public liturgy in German; and a third kind of worship-meeting about which he writes (W.A.19,44):

*"The third kind of service should be a truly evangelical order and should not be held in a public place for all sorts of people. But those who want to be Christians in earnest and who profess the gospel with hand and mouth should sign their names and meet alone in a house somewhere to pray, to read, to baptize, to receive the sacrament, and to do other Christian work..."*

Luther even saw the need for a celebration type service, attracting the masses, like having "an open air - worship amongst Pagan and Turks. I am happy if you ring all the bells, play all the organs and trumpet on anything which is loud", he writes (WA 73,23).

Luther never came round to do this most revolutionary restructuring of the church. The history of the church lists, until today, a long story of prematurely aborted attempts of restoring the housechurch structure, falling short of this or the other, as many others, who would follow him in those attempts, had to discover for themselves. Luther said about his own failure to implement the housechurch structure: *"But as yet, I neither can, nor desire to begin such a congregation...for I have not yet the people for it, nor do I see many who want it. But if I should be requested to do it and could not refuse with a good conscience, I should gladly do my part and help as best I can."*

Dr. Martin Lloyd-Jones believes that in Luther's case it was a "spirit of caution, political considerations, a lack of faith in the people in his churches and fear of losing the movement to the Anabaptists". After 1526 Luther changed his mind and returned back to almost Roman Catholic forms of "services", yielding to the pressure of the

"worldly authorities." He is even directly responsible for the martyrdom of many thousands of Christians who did not go along with his teachings, Luther's contribution to the spirit of the Inquisition. Since 1530 he maintained, that all Christians who publicly preach the word of God and teach, without being Pastors, need to be killed, even if they teach correctly." But Luther was not happy with his achievements. At the end of his life Luther writes: "Amongst Thousands there hardly is a right Christian. We are almost pagans with Christian names." (WA 10,11).

He, like Calvin, who, amongst other innovations, tried to make every citizen of Geneva come to the worship services, - or otherwise pay a fine of three Batzen or ultimately face excommunication - "could not decide to break from the sociological forms of church since the time of Constantine," writes bible teacher Visser 't Hoft.

#### The Apostolic Movement of Schwenckfeld

Luther had a very influential disciple and teacher, Caspar Schwenckfeld (1480 - 1561). Initially, Luther greeted Schwenckfeld, who was a preaching non-theologian, as "a messenger from God," and was greatly influenced by him. Schwenckfeld had a dramatic "born again" experience in 1527, and through his subsequent biblical studies of scripture, however, he started to criticize Luther, pleading with him not to follow through with his sudden new direction after 1530, an almost Roman-Catholic ecclesiology and his teaching that a person can be born again by baptism. "Luther started to persecute Schwenckfeld with bitter hatred, called him a demonized fool and heretic, and refused to even read his writings; he sent them back unread. The Reformer of Schlesien had to wander around Europe like a hunted deer," writes french Bible teacher Alfred Kuen. The outlawed reformer went around and established lively fellowship in many places, which were basically homecells, biblegroups and prayergroups. To avoid further tensions with the established church, Schwenckfeld did not introduce baptism and the Lord's Supper into his groups. When Schwenckfeld died 1561 in Ulm, Lutheran Pastors tried, by force, to bring back his many disciples into the churches, and if they were not willing, had them thrown into jail and their children taken away from them.

#### The Anabaptists

When Zwingli, the Reformer of Zürich, started the work of the reformation, a group of former friends of Zwingli dared to establish a Christian fellowship without the permission of the government in Zollikon near Zürich. They were Felix Mantz, a Hebrew scholar; Conrad Grebel, a member of the city council, from a respected Zürich family; and Georg Blaurock, a former monk and excellent evangelist. Grebel, and many others, had started to discover the Bible, as Zwingli encouraged them to do. In 1524 Grebel had a son, and he refused to have him baptized, because he felt that the bible teaches that faith comes first, baptism only follows. That was a time when many Christians began to read the bible together, pray and have the Lords Supper. Zwingli summoned in 1525 the city council a verdict was given that forced everyone to bring all non-baptized children for baptism within 8 days, otherwise the parents

were to be excommunicated from the church. Baptism, until Easter 1525, was still administered according to the Roman Catholic system, complete with incantations, crossing, anointing with oil and spittle. Grebel baptized Blaurock, who in turn baptized 15 others. That gave birth to the Baptist movement - which the Reformers called Anabaptists - the "again-baptizers", claiming that adult baptisms down-plays God's grace extended at the time of child baptism, and is therefore blasphemy. Zwingli agreed to the sentencing of the leaders of the movement. Grebel died in jail, Blaurock was beaten, sent away and burnt at the stake in Tirol; Mantz was drowned.

The Anabaptist movement grew like wildfire, many feared that the majority of the people will fall for this cult, wrote a historian of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Heinrich Bullinger, successor to Zwingli, witnessed that many thousands became part of those movements, although that meant persecution. Many died for their new convictions. In Netherland and Fresia between 1535 and 1546 alone 30.000 Anabaptists were killed. "The Reformers called them sects, and therefore inherited a phrase from the Roman Catholic church, which declared every form of Christian fellowship outside the church to be a cult," writes Theologian Emil Brunner.

#### Labadie's Converticle

In 1640, Jean de Labadie, a former Jesuit, had become a Pastor in Amien, France. He had one goal in life: the fellowship of the true believers in small "brotherhoods." Soon, however, he was told that "his activities are endangering the peace of the State," and he had to flee to Geneva, where he went "to wake up the church of Calvin which has fallen asleep", says Alfred Kuen. Skeptical Pastors in Geneva quickly arranged for him to pass on to the Netherlands. The main emphasis of Labadies work was a shift from a focus on church buildings into private homes. Labadie wrote the first book on the foundation of "Converticles," small fellowships of converted believers. He gave them practical advise what to do in house meetings: Word of introduction, prayer, singing, Biblereading, free prophecy according to 1. Cor. 14:24-26, or discussing a biblical text together. His work attracted great attention; one of his students was Spener. But because of "his stubborn determination to gather Christians in small groups", reformed Pastors in the Netherlands resisted him. Labadie was finally excommunicated, and died in Altona.

#### The Huguenots and the "Church in the Wilderness"

When Claude Brousson, the famous Huguenot was publicly executed in 1698 before a crowd of 10.000 people under the bloodthirsty rule of Luis XIV in mostly Roman Catholic France, he sang Psalm 34 just before he died. That Psalm and it's message reached as far as the shores of England, and was picked up by Daniel Defoe and others, who were part of the Dissenters, those with a "different sense" or opinion. The Dissenters were, in some ways, the English version of the Huguenots, a protestant movement forced underground by an extreme persecution through the Catholic Church. They organized themselves into housechurches and "The Church in Wilderness", as they called it in reference to the Israelites delivered from the Egyptian

oppression (Acts 7:38), large gatherings in forest clearings, again living out both structures, cells and celebrations. Defoe ultimately was put to jail, where he went ahead and wrote the famous story about Robinson Crusoe. "Crusoe's sailing the oceans was a description for the freedom of a person in Christ. His shipwrecking experience reflected Defoe's imprisonment, and the island was a symbol for his cell in jail," says veteran missionary Ken McVety.

#### Spener and the church that was not the church

Philip Jakob Spener (1635- 1705), the father of Pietism in Germany, saw that the existing church needed a correction, and small groups for encouragement and discipline were necessary. He began such meetings in 1670 under the name "pious gatherings" (collegia pietatis). Those Christians met twice a week in houses, sometimes discussing the previous Sunday morning sermon of the Lutheran Church, then they became more Biblical discussion groups. This resulted in opposition from Lutheran churches, and in his home city, Frankfurt, the city council finally refused to allow the groups to meet in homes. "Spener was a victim of an inadequate definition of his own small groups. Although he obviously believed the small groups to be the church, he did not want to frighten the established Churches. He made the small groups and appendage to the established church and doomed the movement", says William Beckham. His "Gemeinschaften" (fellowships) were basically sub-standard churches, not intended to replace the existing church. He therefore also forbade sacraments in the home groups. At the end of his life Spener had become cynical and cautious. Once he moved away from Frankfurt, he did not start any other groups.

#### John Wesley's Cells

Many historians of early Methodism agree that the key to the methodist revival was the accountability of the new believers in small groups - what Wesley called the classes. Howard A. Snyder in his book "The Radical Wesley" says: "*The classes were in effect house churches. In weekly midweek meetings, which lasted an hour or so, each person reported their spiritual progress, shared on particular needs and problems, and most conversions occurred here.*" Methodism was interconnected by a network of societies (classes joined together). In 1768, 30 years after its start, Methodism had 40 "circuits" and 27,341 members. By the turn of the century, one out of every thirty Englishmen were Methodists. "*Wesley put about one out of five people, mostly from poor and uneducated folk, laboring men and women with little and no training, but with spiritual gifts and eagerness to serve into significant ministry and leadership. Thus, he made leaders of thousands of them.*" He proved what Luther wished for, but did not dare to try: that ordinary people are made extraordinary by God and are well capable, within a setting of the housechurch structure, to create a tremendous movement. Slowly Methodism began to put again more emphasis on Sunday morning congregational-style church meetings in buildings according to the Anglican patterns. "*As they de-emphasized the accountable relationships they had in their class meetings, the revival movement began to*



*decline*”, notes Larry Kreider in his book “House to House.” Today, as the following story indicates, even denominational Methodism is sometimes used as a banner to persecute housechurches: “Christian Zealots broke into a home-based church in the Solome Islands, tied up five men, and destroyed the house because a “non-Methodist” worship service was being held, the news agency Reuters said early November 1998. The Pacific island’s constitution guarantees freedom of religion, but traditional customs and values sometimes intrude on freedoms. A number of variations of the Christian faith are practiced and some village bylaws require villagers to attend several worship services a week. Methodist chiefs said ancestral customs allow only Methodist worship in some villages. The mayor of Salamumu said the men had been warned not to worship in the village.”

#### The “Housechurch-movement” in England

During the 1970s England saw the birth of what has been called the restoration or Housechurch movement. One of the battle cries of this movement was that, traditional church services and church life were in dire need for “restoration” through New Testament principles. This movement was largely driven not by a new way of understanding the church as a housechurch as opposed to a meeting in a church-house, but by a rediscovery of the spiritual gifts and the implications that go with it. As some traditional churches did not give space for the practice of those gifts, groups of people moved out, like Wesley of old simply preaching open air when the Anglican pulpits were forbidden for him. They ventured into literally “bishop-free-zones” where they could practice their new found belief-system without interference of traditional church authorities, and what more convenient place to do this than the homes. Although initially these new church groupings often moved into homes for their meetings - from which they got their name, “*the house-church movement was a misnomer,*” says Arthur Wallis, “*because there was no sense in which they viewed the home as sacrosanct. As churches grew, there was no problem in moving to more commodious venues, such as schools, community centres, town halls, or even to purchase disused church buildings.*” Houses, as a meeting place, were considered a matter of very little relevance. Much of this movement seemed to have fallen back quickly to conform to the very same congregational church structures and worship patterns they departed from, except placing a high value on a breakthrough pastor, powerful worship, spiritual gifts or fervent evangelism. In other words, they renewed the quality without touching the structure, and poured new wine into a new set of old wineskins. Even the planting of many new churches did not change much, because it was ultimately still old structures which were planted anew. One of the early results of the strong leadership these groups required in moving and sometimes struggling them out of the existing structures was what has become known as “heavy shepherding”, an overshot and heavy handed approach to counseling and pastoring resulting from simply too much authority in the hands of one “key leader”. This has instilled a lot of unnecessary fear in those outside the movement of being cultic, but has almost completely vanished by now. After a spectacular phase of initial growth many original “housechurches” are housechurches in the true sense no more, and may have never

been. Many have now settled for a fairly traditional "family church structure", have birthed youth churches or celtic churches or become or joined another network or denomination. About one third of today's evangelical churches in England are now part of the "New Churches", as they are generally known.

#### Longevity of housechurches

Some have said that housechurches could be another quickly fading fashion, another flash in the pan. I agree, specially if housechurches would become a new wave, a new or latest "model" to follow. Congregational structures need a considerable amount of control, hierarchy, infrastructure, finance, rhetoric, motivation and mobilization to keep the organization - and the spiritual organisms, fellowships and circles within - alive. Housechurches, however, are a living thing in themselves, they are organic. And far from being quickly extinct, they have already stood the test of time. Not only did the church survive in housechurches during the New Testament time and after that until Constantine; my historical observations make me to believe that *the Body of Christ, the Church, actually survived the centuries of the dark Ages in the congregational church because of the housechurch*. The housechurch within the congregational church became God's Arch, where fellowship never really died, and the flame of faith was kept alive. Most spiritual movements, theological renewal movements or so-called lay movements in history created small groups, "converticles", bands, cells. Many did not call it "housechurches" as we do again today, but it is evident that the historical equivalents or attempts in housechurches have functioned as a kind of spiritual conservatory over the centuries, and in present days have helped the Body of Christ to not only survive but actually flourish in nations like Russia or China. Sometimes this flame flared up and developed larger movements like the Moravians, or caused whole congregational denominations to get ignited; but usually only for a time, until the structure drowned the spirit again in what I call the "Galatian pattern": *Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?*" (Gal 3:3). This pattern seem to have been repeated countless times in history. No matter how spirited a new church or movement began, it always tended to fall asleep sooner or later, usually on the basis of being excited about itself and in relishing and recounting its own past achievements. As a result, it fell into a congregational mode. This is one of the tragic developments of the church in India, as *Donald McGavran* in his book *"The founders of the Indian Church"* points out. This pattern seems to be found almost in each nation: almost all indigenou churches started in homes; most of them ended up in cathedrals, or the local equivalent of them.

#### Apostolic-prophetic reformation

According to Eph. 2:20 the apostolic and prophetic ministry is not only essential for the foundation-laying of the church, apostles and prophets are the very building material of the foundations of a church. Although the bible reminds us to "test the apostles" and "weigh the prophets", it seems clear that the apostolic role is more

foundational, and that it is healthy for prophets to submit to apostolic authority as well as to the authority of a local church. I assume that also includes the planting of churches, in the past, the present and the future. Dispensational theology neatly divided the history of redemption into segments or "dispensations," and claimed that the apostolic and prophetic ministry are not needed any more, because we now have the Bible. This led to a dangerous biblicism, where God's word literally became a subject to be studied and scientifically investigated, and almost replaced God Himself as the object of worship, with a subsequent proliferation of "Bible study groups". The other effect was that, from the ranks of the fivefold ministry mentioned in Eph. 4:11, this left only three ministries: the Pastor, the Evangelist, and the Teacher. Developing churches with only those ministries, without the anointing and gifts of the prophetic and apostolic ministries, have created pastoral and evangelistic models of church, or churches which were built around the ministry of the teacher. This teaching-oriented, pastoral and evangelistic models of church, although they have filled whole countries, have not truly disciplined them.

#### Can Evangelists become false prophets?

In many ways, Evangelists and their organizations and plans have been and still are received by the wider church today as if they were God's prophets. However, an Evangelist is a true evangelist when he does the work of an Evangelist. If he starts to act like a prophet, he begins to walk outside of his spiritual jurisdiction, crosses a line, assumes a ministry for which he has no anointing, and is in the danger of becoming "a false prophet," sidetracking the Body of Christ with a good heart and healthy intentions, but trapped into a wrong understanding of himself and the nature of the task of the Church. If we treat Evangelists as the prophets of today, the true prophets will be looked upon as naive fools. The result is, that the Church will hesitate to follow prophetic and apostolic direction, because it has already bought into an evangelistic spirit and mentality, and has therefore become less than God wanted it to be.

Many Christians understand, that we are seeing today a major resurrection of the apostolic and prophetic ministries on a global scale. This will change the church inside-out. We can be sure it will lead to the resurrection of apostolic-prophetic patterns and structures of church. I am convinced the housechurch is exactly such a pattern.

#### Getting close - The talk that never happened

One can think of an imaginary conversation between Jesus and the Church, his bride on earth. The topic of the conversation was: Housechurches throughout the ages. *"You may remember that I said, I will build my Church,"* Jesus said. *"And because I promised to be always with you until the end of the Age, I also wanted the church to be part of your every-day life, in the places where you live, in your houses."*

There was a murmur of astonishment amongst the disciples.

"Oh," said Pachomius the founder of the monastic movement, "what you intended to say was that you wanted us to be part of monastic orders and cells of monks?"

"Not exactly," said Jesus.

"*Ecclesiolae in Ecclesiae*? - little churches within the real big church" asked Luther.

"Close!" said Christ, "but not quite yet what I mean.

"*Collegia pietatis* - pious Bible reading groups in homes?" asked Ferdinand Christian Spener.

"Prayer groups, or at least community type fellowships?" asked the Moravians in Herrnhut. "We could also call them *Gemeinschaften!*", they added.

"No, I intend housechurches," Jesus answered.

"Now we know what you mean. Bible study groups, right?!"

"Well, how about evangelistic Biblestudy groups, or how do you feel about LEGS, Lay Evangelistic Group Studies," asked a movement in the Philippines in the 1970s.

In the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries many voices shouted for attention, almost all at the same time.

"Is it Youth groups?," they probed. "Care groups? Sunday school groups? Small groups? Home groups? House groups? Life groups? Or maybe New Life groups? Follow-up groups? Discovery groups? Discipleship groups? Ministry groups? Oikos groups? Serendipity-groups?"

"Well, he does not like the word 'groups'," someone suggested helpfully. "Lets try it with cell!"

"Well, how about House Cells, then; or at least Home Cells? Care cells? Life cells? Or just plain Cells?"

No answer.

"Alpha! what he means is Alpha groups!" exclaimed someone. "He will like the name, and we like the food and the fact that it is only community for a short time. Just what our short-lived society looking for."

"Base Ecclesial Communities?" asked a movement in the Roman Catholic Church.

"Is it TLC?"

"What is that?" asked Jesus.

"Well, Tiny Little Churches, of course," was the answer.

"I do not understand the first two words in that slogan. What is so tiny and little about me?," asked Jesus.

*"Well, then, we have found it! Cell church, complete with Assistant Subdivisional Zonal Pastor, type B-Evangelism harvest events and a long list of proven conversation-icebreaker questions,"* exclaimed somebody.

*"Well,"* said Jesus, *"what I really mean is just housechurches, simple unsophisticated housechurches, the church as they meet in ordinary homes. Why is that so difficult to understand for you?"*

### 3. The nature of housechurches

*What they are, what they do, and how they function*

#### What it is

Housechurch is a supernatural and communal way of expressing the Christian life based in homes. It is the way redeemed people live locally. It is the organic way disciples follow Jesus together in everyday life. Since the redeemed do not any more belong to themselves, they adopt a mainly communal lifestyle, not any more purely private and individualistic; housechurches emerge when truly converted people stop living their own life for their own ends, and start living a community life according to the values of the Kingdom of God, and start to share their life and resources with those Christians and Not-Yet Christians around themselves. It is the result of the conviction that we do not only experience Jesus Christ and His Spirit in sacred rooms dedicated for that express purpose, but in the midst of life. In that sense, the organic housechurch is the deathbed of egoism, and therefore the birthplace of the Church. True community starts, where individualism ends. *Art Katz*, a Messianic Jew who lived in community much of his life, says: *"Community life pulverizes your old Ego in the power of the Spirit of God, and rescues you from just living a miserable private life, were after loving each other during a one-hour worship service a week we rush home to water our flowers, sit on our porch, eat our individual meals and wash our car. Our! We need to start to function as part of the fellowship of the redeemed. As the redeemed, we do not go home after a service, we are at home with each other."* Housechurch Christianity is the Body of Christ in an ordinary house, the society of the "three-times converted", those who are vertically converted to God, horizontally converted to each other, and therefore able to be converted to serve the world in love, compassion and power. In many ways a housechurch is like a spiritual extended family, relational, spontaneous, and organic; for its everyday life it does not need a higher level of organization and bureaucracy and ceremonies than any ordinary large family. In fact, housechurches reflect very much the way relatives behave with each other. Because housechurch is a supernatural creation, invented and endowed by God, it has, more than just a clan of nice relatives, certain capabilities. One is to form its own support structure from within, namely the five-fold ministry, which functions like the support structure a human body develops, the lymphatic and nerve systems, blood vessels and bone structures. People will do almost anything in order to earn the love, respect or appreciation of the people around them. The housechurch provides a healthy a non-competitive way for that. It is, after all, a way to love, forgive each other and live together.

#### How it is

The housechurch reflects God's qualities and character. This community lifestyle is molded in the spirit of love, truth, forgiveness, faith and grace. Housechurches are the way we love each other, forgive each other, mourn with those who mourn, and laugh with those who laugh, extend and receive grace, and be constantly in touch with

God's truth and forgiveness. It is a place where all masks can fall, and we can be open to each other and still keep loving each other.

#### What it does

As we are always in the danger of taking blueprints and simply copying the "action part" of it, I want to remind you again that I am not recommending anyone to make 1:1 copies of a New Testament church, but to take the New Testament principles and values very serious, as God-given essentials; and only then create a housechurch movement in our time, local soil, and specific culture or even tribe. This is much more a process of incarnation than contextualisation, of God becoming flesh again in your context, than making cheap photocopies of existing models somewhere else. The people whom God typically and scripturally uses to unfold and incarnate the church in a given situation are apostolic and prophetically gifted Christians.

As we have studied the New Testament and the Early Church as well as contemporary housechurches, *four elements* stand out. They seem to be like the basic skeleton of housechurches of almost all times:

#### 1. "Meating"

*They meet to eat.* Whenever Jesus was teaching people, it usually involved meeting with them in their homes, eating and drinking whatever they offered. Typically, the teaching of Jesus was right at the table, over a meal, not only after a meal, surrounded by children and visitors, not in an artificial seminary-setup, but in a real life situation. The housechurch, similarly, is literally a table community, sharing real food. *The Lord's Supper was a substantial supper with a symbolic meaning, not a symbolic supper with a substantial meaning.* As they were simply eating a lamb together, it dawned on them what this was all about: *humans having dinner with God.* The Hebrew tradition of eating was breaking a bread first to start the meal, then having the main course, and then having a toast of wine to end the meal. It had three courses, starter, main course, and dessert.

The New Testament reports on the Early Christians: *"They ate together with glad and sincere hearts"* (Acts 2:26), which was quite possible a daily experience. Eating was a main purpose of them meeting: *"When you come together in order to eat, wait for each other"*, says Paul (1. Cor 11:33). Eating is very central to the extension of the Kingdom. When Jesus sends his disciples two by two (Lk 10:1-8), he advised them to find a man of peace, and *"eat and drink what they give you."* As disciples admitted their own elementary need and accepted material food from their hosts, they shared life at a very intimate and basic level, prophetically admitting they are all dependent in God who gives all mankind their daily bread, whether they know it or not. That, in turn, opened their hosts for the bread of life the disciples had to offer.

Very central to the social identity of each person is, with whom do we eat. In most cultures we usually eat regularly only with those with whom we share the same blood, our family members. This is exactly part of the message of the housechurch as a "table

fellowship”, in which we are all eating as part of God’s household, where God is the father (Mt 23:9), Jesus is the Master of the house, and the disciples are the children (Mat 10:25), and we are so obviously made one family by the blood of Jesus that we even eat together, which, previously, was unthinkable. Sharing one of the most basic of human needs, ordinary food, was and still is a sign of deep and revolutionary fellowship, cutting through all previous national, caste and clan and tribal affiliations. In some nations, eating together is one form of sealing a legal contract, or making peace with each other. People of most diverse backgrounds eat together delivered a strong and powerful message to the world: ”We are now one family; see, we even eat together!”

## 2. Teaching each other how to obey

In Hebrew culture, the traditional teacher was the father teaching his family in his house, usually around table times. Teaching traditionally is geared to show somebody how to do things, and to explain why things are the way they are. The goal of the teaching is not increasing knowledge, but helping people to obey and serve God and his purposes (Rom 1:5). The Elders of housechurches assume exactly the same house-father-role, together with charismatically gifted teachers, either residential or visiting, or typically visiting apostles teaching from ”house to house” (Acts 20:20). Although the Early Church grew and multiplied very much without a written New Testament, the ”Word of God increased” (Acts 6:7), ”grew and multiplied” (Acts 12:24), ”spread” (13:49), ”grew and prevailed mightily” (19:20). The subject of teaching is ”the Word”, God’s story, the Bible, what God has chosen to reveal to us about Himself, ourselves, the history of the world, and the way to live (1 Thess 4:1), so we can fit our story into His-story.

The goal of the teaching is that humans, through joyful obedience liberated from the power of Self through a bonding relationship to Christ, can better fit in according to God’s created patterns of life and become mature and normal - according to the norm of God, and therefore be transformed into the image of Christ. This was systematic teaching at it’s best, not at all geared at delivering a complete A-Z-set of doctrinals to students of Christianity alone (did you go through the book of Romans, yet?). If at all systematic, then the original teaching ”system” was relational, geared at presenting a disciple mature in Christ through a spirit of quick obedience and a developed gift-oriented ministry.

The teaching style can be a very short talk - no sermon! - , an illustration, parables and stories, usually accompanied and punctuated by ”nods and grunts of approval” or healthily interrupted by questions and requests for more tea or another sweet. This is followed by a question and answer time which is interactive and dynamic, and allows for everyone to participate and get the explanation he needs. *”Questions often reveal what a person is thinking and can help to remove mental blocks if we deal with them rightly and therefore encourage spiritual growth”*, says Met Castillo. If at all there is an exam to pass in this style of teaching, it is twofold: to obey the teaching and demonstrating it by a changed life, and to start teaching others, too. Jesus said:



*"Teach them to obey everything I have commanded to you"*(Mt 28:20). Learning is not only hearing, but seeing how it is done, then doing it, and finally teaching it yourself to others.

The Greek word often translated "preaching" in the New Testament is "dialegomai," which means having a dialogue between people. When Paul "preached for a long time" in Ephesus (Acts 20:7), and young Epaphras fell to his shortlived death, Paul actually did not preach at all in the sense of having an endless monologue; he was having a dialogue, a time of questions and answers. This way the participants have a chance to drive the teaching by their own questions, and that keeps their interest level awake, and their learning curve steep.

This is very different from a western concept of teaching, which is often geared to allow people to gain intellectual control over things and then manipulate them according to their desire, and where the teaching style is usually an address, a professorial monologue geared at students in an academic setup, removed from real life. In technical terms, the eastern teaching style is kinetic, like a movement, where the topic of discussion literally moves around the table from person to person, and where everyone is involved; after such deliberation, a consensus is built, a collective opinion emerges, and corporate action can follow. In the West the style is often static, the classroom approach; the teacher indoctrinating a passive crowd, trying to bring across his points, true to a Greek and Roman concept of scholasticism and intellectualism, where the goal is handing down knowledge through the ages to individuals.

Communication theory has proven that the confrontational and static style is a most ineffective teaching tool, whereby the participatory and kinetic model is most effective in changing opinions, values and therefore changing people; some of the reasons for this is that it is simply more humane, and it is part of real life, not in an artificial environment, that it is driven by real people with real and existential questions, not according to some theoretical textbook and an agenda printed far away.

This teaching style is geared to help people become "doers of the word", teaching them to obey everything Jesus has taught us (Mt 28:20). Scientists tell us we remember 10% of what we read; 20% of what we hear; 30% of what we see; 50% of what we hear and see; 70% of what we say ourselves; 90% of what we do ourselves. It is simply good scientific practice as well as good stewardship with time and people available to help and develop others to express themselves, getting them involved, teaching them to teach others how to practically obey Christ in real life. Is there a better and more effective way to teach than by living the truth and the teaching about the truth with others, teaching by example, and, as this New Testament lifestyle is surely highly questionable, being ready to answering any pertinent questions?

A young girl of seven years might raise her hand and say: "My dog has been run over by a horse cart today and died. Do dogs go to heaven?", providing a perfect opportunity to teach from the Bible in a real life experience about heaven and earth, and yes, about the place of dogs in creation. This teaching style speaks straight into

the life of people, because life itself asked the question, and the living God, the father of the oikonomia, the "household of God," answered it.

### 3. Sharing material and spiritual blessings

What the rich young ruler, to whom Jesus said *"Sell everything you have and give to the poor...and come, follow me"* (Lk 18:22) did not do, the church did it: "All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need." (Acts 2:44-45). As the company of the redeemed, we do not belong to ourselves any more; we belong to God and therefore to God's community. All what we are and what we have, is therefore God's - and belongs to God's family, the church - not in theory, but in practice. The question is not: what percentages should I give, but why should I hold back anything, after being saved from sure hell by a loving God who gave his very life to redeem me.

The New Testament Christians shared two things together in their housechurches, material and spiritual blessings:

*"No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had . . . There was no needy person amongst them. From time to time those who owned lands or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales, and put it at the apostles feet, and it was distributed to anyone as he needed."* (Acts 4:32-35).

They also shared spiritual blessings:

*"When you come together, everyone has a hymn or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation."* (1. Cor. 14:26). Paul encouraged the Christians to *"speak to one another with psalms and hymns"* (Eph 5:19), and said to Timothy: *"The things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others"* (2. Tim. 2:2).

Christians knew that they are not any more the owners of themselves; Christ owns them, and everything they had. When Christians come together, they share what they are and what they have, whether it is spiritual or material. In practice each housechurch had a common fund, into which all of them deposited money, clothes, valuables. Everyone had something to share and therefore was able to serve others, which made everyone able to appreciate and value each other.

This may sound as an ideal picture of a bygone era of social romanticism to some, but that does not mean we can simply ignore the God-given concept of sharing. Paul later had to collect money from other churches for the Church in Jerusalem, which only shows that the concept of sharing material blessing is meant to be extended across the boundaries of the local church. No God-given concept is foolproof, the weakest link are always we humans, who in our weaknesses, like Ananias and Saphira, create less than glorious exceptions to the rule.

However, this radical biblical lifestyle of sharing saves a lot of everyday expenses, establishes a deep bond of community amongst the Christians, and is in itself a witness to Christ sharing his own life and death with us, so that we may live with him.

#### 4. Praying together

"They devoted themselves to prayer." (Acts 2:42). Prayer is the heartbeat of a relationship of a child of God with his father in heaven; whenever therefore Christians come together, they will pray for each other, pray for the authorities, pray for peace, come before God in petition and thanksgiving, pray for their enemies, bless those who curse them, practice exorcisms and pray for healing.

Prayer is a two-way communication, and as we talk to God, God might want to talk back to us. He often does this through prophets, tongues which are interpreted, dreams and visions, or angels. "God does nothing without revealing his plans to his servants, the prophets." (Amos 3:7). Prophecy has been an integral part of housechurches: "Two or three prophets should speak; you can prophesy in turns" (1. Cor 14:29). Housechurches, contrary to, did not have a set agenda for their meetings, a liturgy. The living Christ *was* the agenda. That also meant that if a housechurch did not know what to do next, they could simply pray and prophecy, so that God might reveal what He wants them to do next, or what He wants them to pray about next.

Supernatural messengers, messages and prophecy helped to pinpoint sin (Acts 5:3; 1 Cor 14:24), give special tasks to the disciples (Acts 8:26), identify spiritual potential (9:10-19), arrange divine appointments (Acts 10:9-47), develop apostolic breakthroughs (Acts 16:6), and simply encourage individuals (Acts 18:9-11).

In the prayer Jesus taught us, he encourages us to pray: "*Forgive us our sins*". (Lk 11:4) In a family that shares their lives together no misconduct can be hidden for very long. They provide a healthy accountability and check for each other. Similarly, housechurches as spiritual families are an ideal place to be accountable for each others conduct, which naturally involves the confessing of our sins: "*Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other that you may be healed*", says (James 5:16). As people confess their sins in front of each other and forgive each other (Col 2:13), whatever cultural format is appropriate, they stop being hypocrites, break the power of hidden sins in their lives, confess their own need for grace and forgiveness, lose their face and gain the love and respect of fellow sinners redeemed by God, leave the darkness and live in the light (1 John 2), humble themselves and experience how God will lift them up (James 4: 7-10). We would repent because of a shame for what we have done, not in order to avoid the consequences of sin. This also would reinstate a healthy and natural form of church discipline, so well known to the New Testament church.

## Sheep and goats: a living faith makes the difference

"When the son of man comes in glory", Jesus will not divide the sheep from the obvious wolves (Lk 10), like we could expect, but he divides sheep from the goats. Goats, for the casual onlooker, almost look like sheep externally, but they behave very different and seem to have a much more negative character, are less gregarious, that is, fellowship-loving, for example. This is highly significant. Jesus makes a decision about where a person is going to spend eternity, in heaven or in hell. The defining factor in this passage is not whether we belong to the right church or have once said the right creed or prayers, but whether we lived a living faith. Jesus had already warned sternly that *"not everyone who says to me Lord Lord will enter the kingdom of heavens, but only he who does the will of my father who is in heaven"* (Mt 7:21), which will cause quite some consternation amongst folk that was just into driving out demons, prophesying and performing miracles. Jesus sends them away in the strongest possible terms: *"I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers."* (Mt 7:23). Jesus does not want to have anything to do with such people in eternity. *"Faith without works is dead"*, says James.

The conclusion of all this is simple. Jesus expects us to live a living faith, to live the truth he preached, or even we preach. And when Jesus was asked to explain more clearly what he meant, he described someone who has experienced housechurch Christianity: *"I was hungry and you gave me to eat; thirsty, and you gave me something to drink; I was a stranger and you invited me in; I needed clothes and you clothed me; I was sick and you looked after me; I was in prison and you came to visit me."* (Mt 25:31-46). Housechurch Christianity is about sharing lives, about being gregarious sheep in the power of the spirit of God. We eat and drink together; give a bed to strangers who pass through; share clothes, look after our sick people, and when somebody is in prison - presumably not because he stole an apple or a chicken, but exactly because he was a Christian and is persecuted because of his faith! - we would visit him and probably risk being incarcerated with him. Why on earth would we do this? Because we are family. *"Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me,"* says Jesus. Jesus did not speak of his natural family and physical blood relationships; he considered *"whoever does God's will"* as his "brother and sister" (Mk 3:35), that is, fellow Christians.

I am afraid that the solution is not really to try to delegate all this to charities, to paid pastors, counellers and prison ministries against a tax-deductible donation. "The Way" is to do this as a regular lifestyle ourselves. The way we live makes quite a difference, even about heaven and hell. That does not mean we are saved by works, and not grace. But it means that our life shows our faith, at least in the eyes of Jesus. And I am not prepared to argue with him about that. It only seems clear that Jesus strongly advocates a lifestyle for his followers which can easily be lived out in informal, relational and organic housechurches, spiritual families who take expert care of each other and of those God wants to touch through them.

## Housechurches in the Bible

*"God does not dwell in temples made with hands*

*(Acts 17:24)*

This booklet cannot provide an extensive biblical study of the subject, there are other works which have done just that extensively, like "The Church in Thy House" by *Dr. Met Castillo* or "The Church in The House" by *Bob Fitts*. A short overview reveals, that

Not only individuals, but whole houses are recipients of the Gospel

Matthew 10: 14 "And as you enter the house, give it your greeting. "And if the house is worthy, let your greeting of peace come upon it; but if it is not worthy, let your greeting of peace return to you. "And whoever does not receive you, nor heed your words, as you go out of that house or that city, shake off the dust of your feet."

Luke 10:5 "And whatever house you enter, first say, 'Peace be to this house.'"

Luke 10:7 "And stay in that house, eating and drinking what they give you; for the laborer is worthy of his wages. Do not go from house to house."

Acts 10:22 "And they said, 'Cornelius, a centurion, a righteous and God-fearing man well spoken of by the entire nation of the Jews, was divinely directed by a holy angel to send for you to come to his house and hear a message from you.'"

Acts 10:30 "And Cornelius said, 'Four days ago to this hour, I was praying in my house during the ninth hour; and behold, a man stood before me in shining garments.'"

Acts 16:15 "And when she and her household had been baptized, she urged us, saying, 'If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house and stay.'"

Acts 16:32 "And they spoke the word of the Lord to him together with all who were in his house."

**Pentecost happened in a house**

Acts 2:2 "And suddenly there came from heaven a noise like a violent, rushing wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting."

**Christians regularly meet in homes**

Acts 2:46 "And day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart"

Acts 5:42 "And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they kept right on teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ."

Acts 8:3 "But Saul began ravaging the church, entering house after house; and dragging off men and women, he would put them in prison."

Acts 9:11 "And the Lord said to him, 'Arise and go to the street called Straight, and inquire at the house of Judas for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for behold, he is praying.'"

Acts 12:12 "And when he realized this, he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John who was also called Mark, where many were gathered together and were praying."

Acts 16:40 "And they went out of the prison and entered the house of Lydia, and when they saw the brethren, they encouraged them and departed."

Acts 18:7 "And he departed from there and went to the house of a certain man named Titius Justus, a worshipper of God, whose house was next to the synagogue."

Acts 20:20 "I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you publicly and from house to house."

Acts 21:8 "And on the next day we departed and came to Caesarea; and entering the house of Philip the evangelist, who was one of the seven, we stayed with him."

Romans 16:5 "also greet the church that is in their house. Greet Epaenetus, my beloved, who is the first convert to Christ from Asia."

1 Cor. 16:19 "The churches of Asia greet you. Aquila and Prisca greet you heartily in the Lord, with the church that is in their house."

Col. 4:15 "Greet the brethren who are in Laodicea and also Nympha and the church that is in her house."

1 Tim. 5:13-14 "And at the same time they also learn to be idle, as they go around from house to house; and not merely idle, but also gossips and busybodies, talking about things not proper to mention."

Philemon 1:2 "and to Apphia our sister, and to Archippus our fellow soldier, and to the church in your house"

2 John 1:10 "If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house, and do not give him a greeting;"

## Practical aspects

### Homegroups are not Housechurches

There are many reasons why the traditional homegroup, bible-study group or prayer group or even youth group is the fiercest competitor of a housechurch. Both concepts look similar, but are miles apart, because they build on very different values, and a very different understanding of church. Where the homegroup is a small part, an appendix of the "big and real" church, a "mini-version" of the church, the housechurch in itself is the church in its fullest and most holistic sense.

### Who leads housechurches

Housechurches do not have leaders in the technical sense, they have elders. Elders are responsible members of society who are able to assume a fatherly or motherly role in the housechurch, and who need to meet biblical qualifications (1.Timothy 3). These local elders are empowered and counseled by apostolic people, who usually function beyond the borders of an individual housechurch, who steer the churches together and sometimes even make decisions in tandem with them (Acts 15:2.4.22.23).

### Baptism

Housechurches are fully functional churches, and therefore usually handle baptisms themselves, unless they want to team up with other housechurches for a larger baptism celebration. Baptisms can happen in a bathtub, a barrel, a pond, a well, a swimming pool, a river, a lake or the sea. Baptism normally happens through immersion in water after the new Christians have professed their faith, following the New Testament pattern. In some cultures housechurches prefer to baptize people immediately after conversion, in other cultures they prefer the candidates to undergo some time of preparation. Paul was baptized three days after his conversion (Acts 9), the Ethiopian Eunuch immediately on the spot (Acts 8), Peter encouraged the 3.000 converts at Pentecost to be baptized that same day (Acts 2:41).

### Weddings

In some cultures weddings are performed by religious functionaries; in other countries, government officials are doing that. Jesus never wedded a couple. The only wedding Jesus was ever part of, we read about in John 2. Jesus was, despite his qualifications, not conducting the wedding. He was adding the wine, and left the functions of society to those who are concerned about it.

Jesus never seemed to be concerned with conducting or presiding at social functions at all, nor was he preparing his disciples for it. He was concerned with a spiritual kingdom, and never attended nor conducted a burial, in fact he said "let the dead bury the dead" (Mt 8:22).

In some cultures and countries, established churches might specialize in solemnizing marriages for all Christians - not only members of their own churches, if the government requires them to do so. In any other cases, the housechurches were usually not concerned with these issues. The society took care of that.

### Children and Housechurches

Since housechurches are spiritual families, children are a natural and important part of the housechurch, just as they are a source of constant joy - and embarrassment - in a natural family. Children are needed to humble us with their questions, break up our endless "adult" discussions, bring us constantly down to earth from our pious clouds, and act as natural evangelists and bridgebuilders. They also help us to prove the fruits of the spirit - patience, for example -, and will serve as heaven-sent spies to spot any trace of religious superstition and hypocrisy in us in an instant. Children have a ministry which is at least as important to us as we as adults have a ministry to them. They are, in short, as important to housechurches as they are to families. Any couple that just had a baby needs to answer the question: Are we now born into the life of our baby, or is the baby born into our life?

If we see a housechurch as a program-driven event with discussion-topics, tasks, objectives and an agenda to achieve (Jesus never taught us that), we might feel that children only "disturb the adults," and therefore need to be separated and put into separate children's groups with their own programmes to keep them entertained and educated. A special time for children can very well be a common exception, but not the rule. Otherwise children will very quickly be alienated from early ages on from church. Church, again, is not a meeting, it is a way of life. If we have children, they are part of our life, and therefore our housechurches.

### Obedient Children qualify for leadership

In 1.Timothy 3 Paul lists a prerequisite to any elder or deacon: obedient children. "If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church?"

"That will never work in Switzerland, because our children simply do not listen, and will constantly scream and take over the programme. They cannot even sit still for 1 minute!", a married woman with a number of small children told me once sternly.

"Do not tell this to me," I replied. "Explain to God why the times have changed and his rules do not apply any more today. That is why planting housechurches does not start on paper. It very well starts in the children's room, with Christian parents rediscovering again and again a spiritfilled way of bringing up their children in their respective cultures, not according to the pattern of this world, but according to the values of the kingdom."



### Young mothers with small children

The following experience might not be applicable or even understandable in many cultures, but it will give you an idea of how mothers, together with their small children, one of the biggest potentials and resources of the church, have been locked up in a system of church that is less than ideal for them. Many young mothers get only noticed in church when, unable to keep a baby silent, they hurry out of the "worship-service", followed by less than favorable glances of the "congregation".

Not long ago, I was having lunch in an English town with a young couple in their flat. They had two children, aged 3 and 1. Between bites of Yorkshire Pudding and sips of Darjeeling, I offhandedly asked the wife, "So, you enjoy your home group, then?"

She glanced at her husband, then somewhat furtively at me and said, "Well, you know..." and then petered out.

Her husband jumped in a hopeful tone, "Yes, we do, very much," trying to smooth over the situation somewhat.

"I think I understand," I said. "Let me see if I've got this... Every Sunday is a little shop of horrors. If the congregation only knew what kind of a drama precedes your entry to the service (punctually 5 minutes late), I don't think you would be an 'elder couple' very long, right? You know what I mean: the kids are fussy, the toast is burnt, Grandma is sick, the dog has made a "mess", Dad can't find his tie and your scarf is ripped. Agitated and nervous - just don't let it show! - covered over with an "Everything's all right! Please don't ask about me!" spiritually, there you stand in the service until the weekly reprieve comes, when the Pastor says, "...and now the children can go to Sunday School!"

Now, at least on Sunday, the kids have Sunday School, but what about Homegroup? Wednesdays at 7:30 just don't work like that. Isn't that the way it is for you?" I asked. "Are you starting to think that your children are keeping you from getting closer to God?"

Pregnant silence.

"And then, here I come, and I have the gall to ask if you enjoy Homegroup. Aren't Homegroups typically a mini-Sunday service, just without a 'Reverend' or an organ? But there's an additional hardship for young families: What'll we do with the kids? A babysitter? Or maybe the kids have to be in bed by 7:20 PM so you can meet everyone at the door with friendly smiles and witty greetings as they arrive.

"How's this for an alternative: the House Church - in the form of a Neighborhood- or Street-Church. But it might start already at 4:00 PM, not at 7:30. The wives get together, have coffee and visit together and with the children, sing some, pray some, talk, cry and laugh together. Then at 5:00 the husbands start to trickle in from work one by one. Instead of going to their own homes and dinner-tables they're also going to the Neighborhood-church tonight.

*At 6:10 PM, that unsaved husband of one of your neighbors furtively comes in the door - for the first time after your 11<sup>th</sup> invitation, and that, mostly because he was invited to a supper, not to a Bible Study. He's nervous and stiff and shifts uneasily back and forth on his chair. His countenance says, "I know that you all want to convert me. I haven't the foggiest idea how you're going to do it, but I'm expecting the worst." At that instant, your 1-year old comes crawling in and makes a bee-line for his trouser leg. When he manages to grab the trousers he coos, "Abudah!" and smears some unidentified substance on them. Then he laughs as only a 1-year old can. In that second, a miracle of transubstantiation happens: From one moment to the next, the stiff neighbor and house-church Elder have become 'daddies', glance at each other and start laughing. The little guy hasn't just eased the tension but also brought in a bit of human warmth into what your neighbor had expected to find as a cold, formal, religious exercise. Suddenly, neither the atmosphere nor your neighbor are the least bit stiff. Everyone's much more natural and relaxed.*

*At about 6:30, everyone sits down to a "potluck" dinner, or perhaps a large pot of spaghetti, or as they do it in China, a large pot of noodle soup. There's some teaching at the table, but it happens like in the New Testament: conversations and discussions, during, not after the meal. People talk of their joys and sorrows, tell success-stories and bloopers, trade insights on razors and cars, pray for and prophesy over each other, joke with the kids, who are not hindering, but enriching the situation, and collect some money for an unemployed widow who's moved into the area.*

*Pretty soon it's 7:30, and time for a collective bed time story before everyone leaves, told by one person to all the kids (from 6 months to 80 years). Perhaps this is when the unsaved neighbor is hearing - and understanding! - the gospel for the first time...*

*How would all that suit you?" I ask.*

*"It's too good to be true," she says, "but what'll our pastor think...?"*

*Gently I interrupt her: "Let's face a tough one. Where's the easiest place for a man to be spiritual?"*

*Isn't it hiding behind a pulpit, where one can preach to a faceless crowd of distant people through a microphone?"*

*And where's the hardest place to be holy? Isn't it at home, in the presence of your kids and spouse, where everything you do and say is tested for real life value? But that's also where the Gospel has the biggest impact, because the message of an extraordinary life in an ordinary setting is its own litmus-test and is much more authentic than an artificial message delivered in an unnatural setting. After all, when Jesus asked his disciples to go as his messengers two by two, he asked them to find a house of peace, eat what they give you, drink what they give you, heal the sick, tell them the kingdom of God has come, and stick with them - do not go from house to house. Not complicated at all, isn't it?"*

### Recapturing the Homes

I believe that over the years and centuries, the church has hidden from the place of painful failure in real and everyday life at home, and has escaped into artificial preaching centres, large cathedrals, bible schools, programmes and seminars. But God is today reclaiming our very homes for Christ. As our homes are again becoming the natural habitat for the church, the down-to-earth community of the redeemed, Christianity in return becomes a powerful testimony at the place where it counts most: next door.

Psychotherapist Larry Crabb, in his recent book "Connecting", says it like this:  
*"Maybe the center of Christian community is connecting with a few, where ordinary Christians, whose lives regularly intersect, will accomplish most of the good that we now depend on professionals to provide. That will happen as people connect with each other in ways that only the gospel makes possible".*

## 4. The Five-Fold Ministry

*God's resources and structure for multiplying housechurches*

Every growth form in life is based on the multiplication of organic cells. This is also true for the church as organic, relational households of God. Once we have discovered that the church is not a series of organized and conducted meetings in religious buildings, but a supernatural communal lifeform, the species of the people of God, as they follow their master together, we may have to rethink how this lifeform multiplies in a healthy and organic way.

"If you want to build the church - use women"

David Yonggi Cho once said: *"If you want to build an organization, use men. If you want to build the church, use women."* We men like to have things under control, and therefore we are fascinated with computers, engines and robots. As long as we pour water and oil into it and provide some grease here and there, our beloved machines keep running, and we are happy. The problem is that the Church is not a machine, but a lifeform, not an organization, but an organism. One of the less obvious facts of churchplanting today is, that a significant percentage of churches seem to be planted by women. It seems clear that God's spirit is challenging the women "to get out there and save the country," as we men still sit, feel the need to discuss some more theology and strategy, and, like myself, write one more book.

"Consider the Lilies how they grow" (Lk 12:27)

In his landmark book *"Natural Church Growth"*, Christian A. Schwarz says: *"We can learn about the church by carefully pondering and analyzing the lilies - how they grow. The growth of plants and other living organisms reveal that they have a 'biotic' potential, the inherent capacity of an organism or species to survive and reproduce. This type of natural growth is not mechanical or artificial. It is God-given."*

"Theo-matic growth"

Is this also true for the Church? I believe yes. The principle can be seen in Mk. 4:26-29, in the Parable of the Growing Seed. A man sows the seed, and whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how. *All by itself* the soil produces grain." The word "All by itself" is the translation for the Greek word "automate", which means automatically. This growth-automatism is actually a "theo-matism", since God Himself is the actual cause of growth, it is Him who "gives the increase" (1. Cor 3:6). This has very serious consequences for our thinking and practice. For a church to grow, then, we must much rather *release* the "biotic growth potential" which God has put into it, not *inject* this potential into the church by

whatever means we intend to do that. The growth potential is already there and wants to get out, and then the growth will happen "all-by-itself." God has kept this part for Himself for good reasons.

#### Not more manufactured churches

We will all agree that the church cannot be manufactured, there can be no man-made revival, no man-made church growth nor a manufactured churchplanting movement. We cannot even "make", manufacture, produce, or hammer out a good sermon, we can only "make" a bad sermon, which is bad simply because "we made it." So what is man's role in this? If we cannot make revival happen, may be we *can stop hindering it!* Proper ministry, then, consists *in releasing the growth automatism* by which God grows His church, not manufacturing it. If we ever hinder this biotic growth potential, we might need to repent, go out of God's way, observe His ways carefully - for example by watching the lilies, as Jesus recommends - and then humbly join in the process at a later stage.

#### Technocrats

In the past, many churches and missions have tended to think the other way round: without heavy programmes and almost superhuman and tireless efforts, constantly teaching and preaching and organizing and fund raising, they have tried to instill the necessary quality into the fellowships and groups they have planted. This is almost like trying to push a car sideways to gain ground, painfully inching along, instead of turning the key and allowing the inbuilt engine to drive the car straight ahead. "The gospel is the power (dynamis) of God", explosive like dynamite, indicates Paul (Rom 1:16). If we try to produce the gospel ourselves, we might be like someone who heats up Uranium 235 over an open fire, rather than allowing the necessary nuclear reaction to take place, which will release unbelievable atomic energies from within that very key element of nuclear reactors or the atomic bomb. We might want to enlarge the balancing wheels of the bicycle of the church, not realizing about the awesome of gift of balance which God has even given to small children.

If we try to handle the church like a company with the best of management principles and foolproof methods, we might start to do the things of God in our own strength, not using God's inbuilt power and growth potential at all; in fact, we might be found fighting it, because it upsets our pre-planned agendas. As a result, we become "technocrats", who control and rule through the help of methods and technical devices. With the very best of intentions and probably pure motives, we may produce useless machines, because our minds - and therefore our methods - had been corrupted. God has provided everything we need for the growth and multiplication of the church - the secret and power is in the seed! We need to make proper use of it.

Do not keep disciples immature by simply teaching them

*"I have been teaching my church for 5 years now, and they still seem so weak", said one young pastor to me. "How many have you taught how to teach?", I asked him. "What do you mean?" he said. "You have already answered my question", I replied. "The teachers' job is to teach them how to teach, and not endlessly do it for them. This, in fact, is a way of artificially keeping people in perpetual immaturity, prolonging their Baby status in the name of great and wonderful discipleship-teaching!"*

#### The organic growth potential seen numerically

Most who come across the housechurch model for the first time do not see immediately its growth potential through organic multiplication. The right quality in the right structure may lead to the right quantity. How can the quality of relationships become so good, that there can be a fast multiplication of churches without loosing the quality? The answer is obvious: this happens *in proportion to the intensity of lives shared in housechurches*, a dynamic which is rarely experienced in traditional churches. Since there sometimes is not much sharing of lives in traditional Christianity, this fact - and its potential - is often overlooked. But this is only one aspect of the quality-part of the growth potential. It is also valid to have a look at the numerical potential of organic housechurches.

#### Elephants or rabbits

A case in point is the different reproduction patterns of elephants and rabbits:

<u>Elephants</u>	<u>Rabbits</u>
only fertile four times a year	Practically continuously fertile
only one baby per pregnancy	average of seven babies per pregnancy
22 month gestation period	1 month gestation period
sexual maturity: 18 years	sexual maturity: 4 months
grow in 3 years from 2 to 3	grow in 3 years from 2 to 476 million

#### Typical growth patterns of housechurches

Housechurches are not multiplying like rabbits, but this example shows the theoretical potential of rapid multiplication. A typical housechurch may have between 6 and 20 people, and usually doubles itself once every 6 to 9 months. For our example we take an average size of 12 people per housechurch, and a less-than-average doubling rate of 12 months. We also assume that in the first year of operation, the housechurch actually does not double itself at all, it may have a leadership problem, or any other starting problem. We remain slightly pessimistic and also assume a 25% fallout rate, periods of growth and consolidation, which means that one out of every 4

housechurches which are started will eventually close down within a given 5 year period for any number of reasons. This will give us the following scenario:

<i>after year</i>	<i>number of housechurches</i>	<i>number of people</i>
1	only 1, not 2	12
2	2	24
3	4	48
4	8	96
5	12 (16-25%)	144
6	24	288
7	48	576
8	96	1152
9	192	2304
10	288 (= 384 - 25%)	3456
15	6912 (= 9216 - 25%)	82.844
20	165,888 (= 221.184- 25%)	1,990,656

This scenario, which has truly happened several times in history as well as in very recent times and even today, will incorporate almost 2 million people in a housechurch movement within a period of 20 years. The process may be accelerated through contextual factors, a shorter multiplication time span, revival, persecution, or slowed down by other factors. The core observation, however, is that the growth is through multiplication, and the multiplication is exponentially, not linear.

#### From addition to multiplication

Housechurches are a multipliable structure. They can literally multiply endlessly, as long as they are provided the essentials. One of the essentials for housechurches are biblical quality and leadership.

Most of today's leadership developing structures are addition-based. We teach young leaders a set of classes and go through some programs which have a similar "output", a similar number of "graduates" each time. We may put people through the Bible School system and faithfully add 50 or 500 each year to the number of ordained pastors and missionaries. But just like graduating each year, there is a certain number of leaders that constantly retires or drops out every year. Moreover, just adding leaders for the multiplying units of housechurches is not enough. Addition cannot keep up with multiplication, because ongoing addition produces linear growth, two plus two is four plus two is six; ongoing multiplication produces exponential growth: two times two is four, times two is eight.

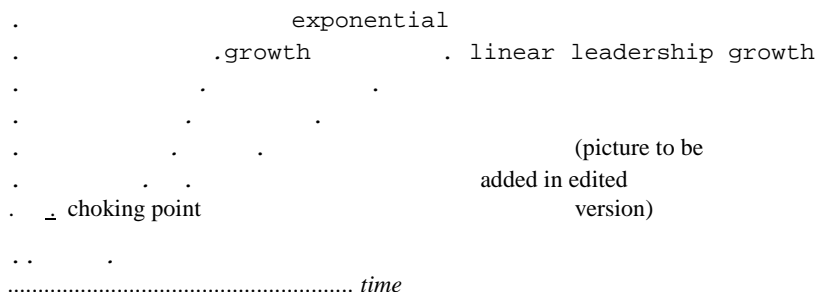
If we try to lead a housechurch movement through a leadership developing structure that is addition-oriented, not multiplication oriented, the leadership developing model itself becomes very soon the limiting factor of the multiplication process of the churches, and the growth stops. God does not want to give birth to Babies only to see them die of malnutrition and cold weather.

#### Another 200 barrier - when addition stops multiplication

If we have multiplying housechurches, which create an exponential growth rate, we need a leadership development structure that grows as fast as the churches multiply. The leadership structure itself therefore also needs to multiply. Either we start multiplying all our Seminaries and Bible Schools, or we find another way.



no of  
leaders



If we draw a linear growth (leadership development) and an exponential growth (housechurch multiplication) development, they both intersect each other at the one point, where the number of housechurches starts to exceed the number of leaders. This results in the movement coming to a grinding halt, because the fledgling housechurch movement runs out of quality and leaders. The support structure has not grown fast enough, and so the whole movement is in the danger of becoming shallow or even cult-like. This choking point interestingly enough often happens around 150 or 200 churches in a given movement, for similar reasons that a traditional One-pastor church usually experiences the "200-barrier" we have been speaking of before. The one leader simply cannot care for more people, and the growth development stops. Usually this might create a new denomination in the process.

There is, however, a way to "break" this inbuilt structural growth problem: we can simply avoid it from the very beginning and

#### Multiply the Five-fold ministries itself

The answer to this structural problem is the so-called Five-fold ministry of Eph. 4:11-13: "God gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to equip God's people for the ministry, so that the Body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith..."

The five-fold ministry functions very much as the self-organizing powers of the Church. They are part of the built-in "biotic growth potential", an internal structure, part of the spiritual DNA of the church, which forms itself within the Body of Christ just like a human Body forms its own lymphatic system, white anti-body system, a blood circulation system etc., with an amazing and inbuilt ability to grow organically with the general growth of the human body, and maintain or even cure itself.

I would like to underline that the fivefold-ministry is standard biblical teaching and practice, and by no means only a speciality of some denominations or of housechurch-Christianity. All of those five ministries have their own task to fulfil in equipping the

saints for the ministry, and constantly circulate through the (house-)churches, like it's very own breathing or digestive system.

#### Empowering people for the ministry

The most important aspect for housechurches is, that these ministries can also multiply themselves: apostles spotting and training other apostles, prophets spotting and training other prophets and multiplying themselves through the simple and biblical process of discipleship. This way, the leadership structure can grow exponentially together with a multiplying housechurch movement. In the words of Barney Coombs: *"Jesus takes beggars and turns them into princes. He gets hold of six foulmouthed fishermen, a despised tax-gatherer and five other nobodies, and transforms them into the elite of Heavenly Jerusalem"*.

The bottom line of this process is the multiplication of empowerment of more and more people to do the work of God. It is to find, nurture and release talented and supernaturally gifted people into their God-given calling in order to bring out God's best in them, and to do this systematically and strategically.

#### Ministries to give away to others

After the Constantine age the church became a channel for the distribution of resources to members rather than challenging members to become resources, says Bill Beckham. The biblical calling of the apostle, prophet, pastor, teacher or evangelist is not at all to assume or usurp "the ministry" and perform it themselves as others look on, but to train God's people for the ministry, to equip others. In short, an evangelist's true fruit is not a convert, but more evangelists. They are evangelistic, prophetic, teaching, pastoral and apostolic trainers, not demonstrators; teachers, not one-man-shows. Strangely enough, exactly the opposite of this biblical model has become the norm: specialist teachers, evangelists, pastors, apostles and prophets move about at a breathtaking speed, constantly overworked and under stress, slaves to their diaries. Unlike Jesus, they are difficult to even approach for others, with more than just their blood pressure in danger. They give seminars and speak at conferences, at which they show to the amazed masses the latest state of the art in their specialist area, and do exactly the opposite of their true and God-given task: instead of equipping God's people for the ministry, they *perform* it for them in front of them. Instead of teaching them how to teach, they just teach. Instead of equipping them to be Evangelists themselves, they simply evangelize; instead of training people how to prophecy, they prophecy and go away without leaving disciples behind. This does not only set unhealthy standards, but leaves both "the teacher and the students" unfulfilled and empty, because they have not done what God wanted them to do: to be discipled into these ministries, to learn each others secrets, to be initiated into the multiplication process themselves. This creates a new caste of clergy and laity, and ultimately fails to prepare God's people to do their ministry. The five ministries are given by God to be given away, to be used in equipping others to do the work of the ministry, which

ultimately means multiplying the structure through which the ministry is operating: the housechurches.

#### The five fingers of the Hand

Gerald Coates, leader of the Pioneer movement in England, compared the five-fold ministry with the five fingers of the hand. The Apostle is the thumb. He gives stability, holds the counterbalance, and can literally touch all the other fingers. The Prophet is the indication finger. He points at you and says: "You are the man!" The Evangelist is the Middle Finger, who is the longest of all, and sticking furthest out into the world. The ringfinger resembles the Pastor/Shepherd, caring for internal relationships. The small finger is the Teacher: he can worm his way and his teaching deep into any ear.

Let me try to illustrate the five ministries a little bit more.

#### The Pastor

The Pastor, in the charismatic and biblical - not the traditional - sense, is by nature a shepherd; he stands in the midst of the herd of sheep. Everything mills around him; but nowhere in the New Testament do we find a pastor truly leading a congregation. He is by nature a very loving person who can create a family atmosphere; to him, relationships are the most important, simply because he is interested in the herd's long-term spiritual wellbeing. The good shepherd knows the names of the dolls of the children of the adults he is caring for; he is interested in every last detail. There's only one problem: a person's greatest weakness almost always lies in the shadow of their greatest strength. The pastor tends to lose the big picture, because he is "lost in relationships." With this ministry usually goes a natural 'professional blindspot'. However, his motto is "Relationships are everything!" The pastor focuses on redeemed relationship with God, and redeemed relationships with each other, and helps others to function in this relational way also.

#### The Prophet

The prophet is way ahead of the herd of sheep, perhaps 5 miles beyond the next hill; he is on the lookout. There he hears God's voice and sees visions, enters the throneroom of God and glimpses something. It may actually be very good that he is often away from the flock, because few really understand him. He is interested not so much in people and what they think of him, but he is interested in God's voice for the situation. Added to that, he often has a complicated and disorganized personality exactly because he is so uniquely gifted. Can you imagine spending a relaxed half hour drinking coffee with Jeremiah? Jeremiah would probably tear you and me apart, and use the tea for an illustration. A prophet's perspective is radically different to that of the pastor. He hears from God and quite mercilessly questions everything, including the pastor, from God's perspective. That, however, is his healthy and God-given duty. For that reason, there is also a historical tension between the pastor and

the prophet: one as a defender of the status quo, who wants to maintain the community; the other who questions everything and is seen (rightly) by many others as a threat, because he disrupts things and wants "movement now". The Shepherd, in many pictures, does not only have a stick in his hand to tend the sheep and keep away the wolves, he also may be quick in using that stick to keep away prophets. And yet both views are valid, because both are serving God and the same flock - one with loving attention, the other with a prophetic view. Both are necessary! The prophet's motto, describing his ministry, is "vision". Prophets often have the unique ability to see and hear what others do not see nor hear. These supernatural revelations need to go through a process of healthy interpretation in the church (1 Cor 14:29) and application. The prophet is groomed by a direct calling from God, and then usually sent "pouring water over the hands of a master prophet", as in the case of Elijah and Elisha (2. Kings 3:11).

### The Apostle

The apostle is not as far from the herd as the prophet. He is about 3 miles away, on top of the next hill instead of being on the other side of the hill like the prophet. From this commanding point, he can see the big picture and study his map, looking for the next green pasture. He generally has no time for house visits and smalltalk; "the world is his church". Like Paul, he is never really satisfied: after Rome, he wants to go to Spain! His core word is "strategy", his heartbeat is "missions": he wants to see God's plans come true for nations. Apostles are very much like generals in an army. They carry the main burden and responsibility for the advancement of the cause. The apostolic ministry is a founding ministry, it can create something out of nothing, create a foundation in the desert, and in many ways unites all other gifts in itself. He may function as a supernaturally gifted problem solver and talent spotter. And if the Pastor - the word is mentioned only once in the New Testament - is something of the equivalent of a spiritual "uncle" - very caring and loving, but not ultimately responsible -, so the apostles, 22 of them are mentioned by name in the NT, are the spiritual fathers who carry the last responsibility, the real agony and joy.

### The Teacher

The teacher, using the picture of his relationship to the flock of sheep, lives at a critical distance from the herd. He sits on a vantage point half a mile from the herd so that he can send out his dogs in time to deal with a sheep which is misbehaving or separating itself from the herd by eating away unconsciously into the wrong direction. His motto is: "The truth, and nothing but the truth!" The teacher is interested in quality, in the details even more than he is in the big picture. He is often a 'footnote' person in the truest and best sense of the word, who likes details and needs to know everything exactly. He has a passion for teaching itself, and his gift is to empower others how to teach others, how to teach. He is, like Jesus, his master-Rabbi, not so much leaving teaching notes behind - but literally his spirit.

### The evangelist

The evangelist circles the herd, also half a mile away - just enough so that he doesn't smell like the sheep pen and frighten the wild sheep away, but close enough to be able to lead them to the herd when he finds a lost sheep. He has three aims and passions: that people find Jesus, find Jesus, and find Jesus. He introduces a healthy outward focus to the churches, and is even involved in discipling new believers into maturity by literally "reading the gospel to them", "evangelizing" them, filling them with the good news. Biblically the Evangelist does not lead the extension of the churches, but works in partnership with apostolic and prophetic people, who bear the main responsibility for laying the foundations of the churches. The Evangelist empowers others to be Evangelists, not in order to create evangelistic enterprises in themselves, but for the housechurches to become or to remain an evangelistic movement itself.

### Avoiding ministry projection

One of the greatest errors of our day is that we have allowed and even encouraged "spiritual gift projection." Gift projection happens when a Christian who has received a particular spiritual gift assumes - projects! - that his gift is the most natural thing in the world, and that all other Christians would automatically achieve the same results if they acted just as he does. The error is this: God has made each of us unique and given each special gifts. Whoever measures someone else against himself is comparing apples with oranges and is doing himself and others a great disservice. He also complicates the lives of other Christians with unrighteous comparisons and simply sins against the body of Christ, in which not everyone is a mouth or a ear.

"Ministry projection" makes the problem worse. At one stage or another, it might be God's plan for a Christian to "stop having a gift and start becoming one", where someone would stop just prophesying, and starts to become a prophet. In ministry projection, the teacher would look at the evangelist and say: "You and your evangelistic campaigns! Theological training, that's what really counts. You have only one problem: you should be a bit more like me!" The pastor looks with horror at the prophet and says: "You and your visions. Long-term relationships are what counts!" He grasps his shepherd's crook, meant for keeping wolves at bay, and also drives the prophets away.

### When a teacher builds a church

If you leave a teacher to develop a church all by himself, he will build it around his unique gifting of teaching, what else could we expect. He might either convert any church into a lecture hall, or plant bible schools or other teaching centres, which sometimes might grow into impressive preaching cathedrals, if he has the necessary rhetoric giftings, where people from far and near come to be amazed. But often enough if the talented man is gone, so goes the centre. A teacher does not really lay foundations; but he explains them brilliantly.

### Evangelistic model of church

Evangelists often seem to live in one endless "rally", and if you would leave them to build a church, they will create a most fascinating series of events and programmes, exciting with a lot of "adrenaline per minute", but will ultimately have only one message to tell. He will be able to gather many, but usually is not exactly gifted to build them together. Very soon the people will get tired of this one-sided spiritual diet and leave, looking for more. Maybe the Evangelist spots the problem also, and leaves before the people do, or, a most elegant solution, becomes airborne and itinerant with a basic equipment of 10 or 20 evangelistic sermons, looking for people who have not yet heard them.

### Pastoral model of church

One of the strongest messages of a charismatic shepherd-pastor to the world is "come to me all you who are heavy laden - I will listen to you and counsel you." And come they do. If the Shepherd is left all to himself, his ministry will naturally create counseling centres, which ultimately may grow into spiritual hospital, where people come to have their wounds cared for in the power of the Holy Spirit. Pastors - like good uncles - have a difficulty in saying "No!". The result is often a choking effect created by the very best gifting in them: they are swamped by more needy people that they can handle, and the growth stops and limits itself. They quickly become "maxed out" and reach their capacity.

### The predominant role of Apostles and Prophets for churchplanting

As important a role spiritual hospitals have to play, they cannot replace what apostles and prophets are uniquely gifted for: to build a supernatural base and foundation for a multiplying church movement, to accept nothing as impossible, to respond strategically to visions and supernatural revelations, to be prophetic talent-spotters. They are not so human-centred and felt-need-oriented "tenders" like good Pastors, Teachers and Evangelists, but God-centred: they have the God-given ability to see beyond things, beyond human needs and problems, and take hold of the tasks and visions of God. They do not want to just build "a church", they want the whole city or nation! They live very much in the future, for the future, from the future, going constantly pregnant with future developments, and can therefore pull and lead the church into the future, and prevent it from becoming a traditional institution only celebrating the past, or a fossilized monument of history long gone. The church is "built on the foundation of apostles and prophets, with Jesus Christ himself as the chief cornerstone" (Eph.2:20), writes Paul. Jesus writes to the church in Smyrna "that you have tried those who call themselves apostles" (Rev. 2:1-7) after almost all of "The Twelve" had died. This suggest simply the continuation of apostles even after the "age of apostles", says *Watchman Nee* in his book "The Orthodoxy of the Church". Like with a foundation for a house, much of the work of apostles and prophets is not always seen but felt. That is why they are called "first of all" (1 Cor. 12:28), because they are also "called in" first of all to do the foundational work for

"founding churches", the site spotting, earth moving, excavating, foundation laying, so that others like carpenter and plumbers and electricians can build on that foundation. Would you like to live in a house where the foundations are laid by a carpenter? I admire carpenters, but I would not like to live in a house where the carpenter has laid the foundation. That is simply out of his brief.

Instead of pastoral, evangelistic and teaching-models of church, apostles and prophets build prophetic and apostolic churches. The apostle, mentioned first in all the biblical lists of ministries, is one *"sent to attempt to solve the unsolvable for the purpose of facilitating the increase of the Church of Jesus Christ in quality as well as quantity"*, says *Barney Coombs* in his excellent book *"Apostles Today"*.

#### The past: each antagonized the other

We need to stop playing these ministries off against each other, and start recognizing those unique giftings in each other. They are all valid parts of the whole picture, each a unique twenty percent of the whole 100 percent of all ministry, with the apostolic and prophetic ministries having a special and slightly more prominent role than the others. The teacher will never be able to take over or replace the ministry of a prophet of apostle, the pastor will not be able to do the work an apostle is called to do, and the prophet might fail miserably if asked to be a shepherd, but flourish if he is allowed to function within his anointing, and prophesy and teach others how to prophesy. The five ministries are meant to function in harmony and synergy, and complement each other perfectly.

#### Translocal Ministries

A housechurch is lead by elders. Not every individual housechurch of 15 people will have their own apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers sitting all together in one small room. Those ministries are equipping ministries, going beyond the scope of a local housechurch, and function translocal, affecting the whole area or, specially in the case of prophets and apostles, even beyond that.

#### Building a spiritual gene-pool for the church of an area

The devils plan has long been for the pastors to stand in one corner, the prophets in the other corner looking out of the window, the teachers sit in the library, the evangelists drinking coffee outside and the apostles roam overseas. In order to see the five fold ministries working together again, they need to be identified afresh. These ministries then need to recognize each other - which might involve some solid repenting to redeem past misunderstandings and correct misconceptions of each other. Then they need to become friends of each other - because *"everything significant in the Kingdom of God is built on redeemed relationships"*, says Roger Forster. Then they need to form teams, usually based on locality - the city, the region, the district, the state, the nation - and start to multiply themselves, prophets multiplying prophets and evangelists multiplying evangelists 30-, 60- or 100 fold, and finally forming the

equivalent of a spiritual gene-pool, an equipping and resource centre for the whole body of Christ in that locality and beyond. From this leadership pool, the right person with the right gift can be dispatched quickly to add to the spiritual diet if needed somewhere, to solve a crisis, or give a specially needed input in any given church or area. The apostolic and prophetic equippers and servants of the Body, similar to civic servants, form a spiritual senate and council for the city or region or nation. One of their jobs is to work hard to avoid the formation of another spiritual dominating elite by forgetting titles and fame and being humble and accountable to each other. Their task is to be responsible for the corporate identity, calling and redemptive purpose of the church in a city or region, for truly speaking with one voice to the nation, for city-wide celebrations and regular apostolic and prophetic envisioning of the church on a wider basis. Business as usual for them will be to make themselves available to any housechurch that needs them, constantly circulating "from house to house", keeping on to pour themselves into God's people as they multiply the housechurches.

#### Are you the man?

Where do you start to develop this spiritual gene pool? With those who have a passionate, supernatural vision for it. Those who can and do cry for a city or region or nation should be the ones to initiate the process; no one else will truly have the anointing for it. It will have to be apostolic and prophetic people, because this is part of their God-given nature. John Knox, the reformer of Scotland, an apostolic man, has once prayed: "*God, give me Scotland or I die!*" This is the kind of prayer that should be naturally on your lips before you do this. Pastor Colton Wickramaratne of The Peoples Church in Colombo, Sri Lanka, himself an apostolic and prophetic man, frequently says it this way: "God's method is a man. Are you that man?"

The first step in many areas is to recognize, form and multiply the individual ministries. We need to do what we are made by God to do. You may work as a Pastor today, but really be a Prophet. Or you may try to be a teacher, but you are a pastor, and you long to get in touch with people, away from all that paper.

#### Three areas of responsibility in the Church

Rather than to develop three layers of hierarchical "leadership levels", housechurches are organically maintained and multiplied through the ministry of three types of specially gifted people:

*1. Elders.* The housechurches are led by elders, whose function is to father or mother the church. They bring redeemed wisdom to the church, overseeing the flock like a father oversees his children, showing them how to live, and add authenticity through a proven family track record and balanced and mature lifestyle.

*2. Five fold ministers.* The elders are equipped and trained by people who have been called by God for one of the five-fold ministries, apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers. Those ministers circulate within the housechurches "from house



to house” and function as a spiritual blood circulating system nurturing all housechurches with the necessary elements to become or remain healthy and therefore multiply. Those ministries are like sinews and joints, linking the various housechurches together to be a whole system. Their ministry is transcending the individual housechurch and serve the Body of Christ like a spiritual gene pool, where the housechurches of an area or a region can draw upon, and sometimes even goes beyond that.

3. *Apostolic fathers.* Those spiritual equippers of the five fold ministry are relating to a third group of what I call ”apostolic fathers”, people with an apostolic and prophetic gifting plus a special calling and charisma from God for a city, a region or a nation. Those apostolic fathers, usually recognizable by the almost unbearable agony and spiritual pain they bear for a place, a city, a nation or a people group (Gal 2:7-9), become the local backbone, the regional or national ”pillars of faith”, anchoring the whole movement of housechurches locally and being responsible for celebrations and the city-church that will emerge. Since they usually have a true kingdom mentality, a broken spirit because of the spiritual burden they carry, they are least viable to build a massive movement and kingdom around themselves, but truly function as serving all - and therefore leading all - not top-down from the lofty heights of a hierarchical power-pyramid, but down on earth, alongside other equippers(Mk 9:35).

The *deacons* can be seen as functioning together with the elders (Phil 1:1), but also as the secretaries and assistants of those apostolic fathers, taking care of administrative needs and social aspects, and keeping the hands free for the apostles to do their work (Acts 6).

#### Talentspotting and recruiting for the Five-Fold Ministry

Research has shown that between 60% and 80% of all Christians do not know their spiritual gifts. How do we help them, and how do we recognize and develop those five ministries?

1. *”By their fruit you will recognize them”* (Mt 7:17). Others can see in us what we cannot see, the ”specks and planks” in our eyes as well as the supernatural giftings God has given us. So we need to ask them what they see. We can help each other by reflecting on each others fruit, ”taste it and tell how we taste”, helping each other to identify our gifts and callings. This happens best during the natural and normal life of the housechurch, or when a group of people ministers together.

2. *Through prophetic ministry.* Prophetic people often simply ”see” how someone else functions; they see a word written all over him, a special sign, they hear a word or see a vision, and so they ”know” by supernatural revelation. I have seen and observed this hundreds of times, and have also seen the joy and liberation in the eyes of

countless people who begin to understand who they are in Christ in terms of their ministry and calling.

3. *By spiritual gift analysis.* There are a number of self-evaluating tools available today in many countries called spiritual gift analysis. This is a "spiritual gift test", where you fill out a form and answer many pointed questions, and may end up knowing more about your spiritual gift and inclination.

4. *By forming a special recruiting ministry.* Most leading companies know that their future depends on the quality of the next generation of their leaders. So they employ so-called human resource companies and placement agencies, or send out their own talent-spotters, who roam the universities and schools to find the kind of gifted people with the right caliber the company feels they need to employ. The Body of Christ could learn from that. We need a supernatural talent-spotting ministry or even a plan, systematically identifying and recruiting those gifts in each other and in the churches, and then helping those junior apostles and prophets or pastors-to-be to become an apprentice with their own role model, someone who is miles ahead of them in spiritual maturity and experience in the very ministry area they feel called to serve. Those disciples and apprentices can carry the suitcases of their masters, or "pour water over the hands" of a senior prophet, and rub off as much as they can, "catching the spirit" of someone ministering in the spirit; just imitate me, as Paul puts it. As an apprentice without a master does not make much sense economically, a disciple without a master does not make much sense, spiritually.

#### Healing the church trauma

Many apostles and prophets today are not in church at all, because there is not much place for them in traditional pastor-centred churches. They have been pushed to the side, they are often feared because they seem so strong, radical and different, and many have not only been marginalized, but truly rejected, and as a result have given up on church almost completely, maybe with a last flicker and a spark of hope still burning in them. Many of them are in business today, or have become medical doctors. More and more of them know deep down that they are made for more than just earning 10.000 dollars a month or operating ulcers, avoiding the church that hurt them, spiritually surviving by TV and Radio, and attending an occasional conference or a Christian businessmen' "Chapter". Those rejected, undiscovered or underemployed apostles and prophets suffer from what I call the "church trauma", a very deep and tricky wound inflicted to them by the very institution of healing, the church, which did not live up to it's own calling and, an almost devilish scheme, has badly hurt those whose ministries it needed most. Many of those Christian businessmen therefore heavily support anything but the church, invest into "parachurch" ministries and missions - called para- (=alongside) church because there is no place for their vision within the Church - , as long as they can stay clear of the church which has hurt them so much. The tragic of this is, that the church is God's mission. Someone needs to find them, go to them, apologize to them profoundly, heal the "church trauma", speak to that glowing spark and fan it into a flame, and then

recruit them, helping them to see how God sees them, and release them into their apostolic and prophetic potential for the building up of the church.

Does this strike a cord?

If you sing a tune to a piano, some of the piano strings reverberate with that melody and give an echo, they simply resound with the frequency of your tunes. This is also true spiritually. Sometimes I explain the fivefold ministry to participants of a seminar, and afterwards ask them to identify themselves and physically stand in their respective five corners. Usually, a small percentage of participants keep sitting, because they still do not know where they belong. I then ask some representatives from the pastors, evangelists, prophets, apostolic and teachers corner to come and simply pray a short prayer for and over those who do not yet know their calling. Then we ask those still sitting whether they have felt or experienced anything special while one of those ministers prayed, whether it struck a spiritual cord in them. If yes, they are then encouraged to join the respective group they felt responding to spiritually, and go to their corners, where I ask those waiting there to lay hands on them and pray, "*fanning into flame the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands*" (1 Tim. 4:14; 2 Tim 1:6).

What is the next step for your area

It depends where you are, and what ministries have been founding or dominating your area or even your church in the past. If there was an overabundance of pastoral and evangelistic ministry in your nation or people group, you may need to consider complementing the effects of these good ministries with apostolic and prophetic and teaching ministries, so that the spiritual ground has all the nurture and care it needs to develop strong fruit.

Watering flowers with ice-cubes?

I believe strongly in the pastoral ministry. I also believe strongly in the other four ministries, the Apostles, Prophets, Teachers and Evangelists, as mentioned in Eph. 4. Like water is found in three forms, ice, water and steam, the five ministries are also found today, but not always in the right forms and in the right places: they may be frozen to ice in the rigid system of institutionalized Christianity; they exist as clear water; or they vanished like steam into the thin air of freeflying ministries and "independent" churches, accountable to no-one. God is transforming the core quality of the five ministries, captured and frozen into neat packages by the era of "Christendom", and gently warming them up, bringing out the best in them for the task of watering his creation, the Church. In fluid form, the five ministries will also find it easier to relate to each other and function and literally "flow" together. Many in the churches today have ill or even hurt feelings about the fivefold ministry, especially about the apostolic and prophetic ministries, because they may have

encountered them in the wrong form or package, either as steam or as ice. But that should not lead us to throw out the baby with the bathwater.

#### The lesson of Liebig

German biologist and chemist Justus von Liebig discovered over 150 years ago that soil only needs basically 4 fertilizers or minerals for the healthy growth of a plant: nitrogen, lime, phosphates, and potash. As long as all four minerals are present in the soil in sufficient quantity and harmony, growth occurs "automatically", the soil is truly fertile, and has all it needs to produce a good crop. If one of the fertilizers is lacking, let us say lime, the growth will be limited and halted by this minimizing factor. The soil starves for lime, and you can add how much nitrogen, phosphates and potash as you want, you will not change the situation at all, and even damage it, unless you add lime.

#### Treatment of overacidic soil

Let us for illustrations' sake equate evangelism with phosphate, prophecy with potash, teaching with nitrogen, and pastoring with lime. If you have a soil thoroughly treated with phosphate (evangelism) and nitrogen (teaching), it soon reaches a saturation level where any more of phosphate and nitrogen will actually have a bad effect, it will make the soil acidic and have the opposite results we desire. What the soil needs now is no more phosphate and nitrogen, but potash and lime in sufficient quantity, so that those minerals can catch up and harmony in the soil is restored.

This could potentially hurt the producers of phosphate and nitrogen, because they might feel rejected; but in effect they are only complemented by lime and potash, so that their good contribution, together with the other necessary elements, will reduce acidity and make the soil fertile ground again.

#### Phosphate around the world!

Someone might stand up in a Christian conference and say: "Phosphate (Evangelism) did it to my church! When I applied phosphate, my church exploded. It was just what I needed, and it is just what you need, too! Brothers and sisters, I have a message for you: you need phosphate. You may not know it, but you need it! Before you even ask, I have the answer: phosphate! It worked for me, it will work for you. Let us start a ministry, 'Phosphate around the world', and tell everyone the blessings of phosphate which will change any church for good."

What do you think of such a man? Would you allow him to speak again in that conference? I would not. I will rejoice for what happened to his church, but I will beware copying him, because the situation in his area may not at all correspond with that in my area. Contextualization - the importing of a foreign idea into native soil - might be a nice idea, but fresh incarnation is better. Given the historic developments in the area of our farmer, he might have been starved for phosphate, but he might need

lime! If I take the advice of the phosphate-enthusiast, I might spoil the ground and do something very bad with something very good. The message again is that we should not copy someone else's experiences and methods, but be apostolic and prophetic ourselves, creative and sensitive to our own situation.

Every good agriculturist can test the soil, finding out it's quality and what fertilizers it would need in which quantity, in order to produce a good harvest. This would be, in this illustration, the job of the apostle. He would be like the wise farmer who knows which of the four minerals are needed. The apostolic ministry would see which of the four ministries are necessary next in order to create a healthy balance that will truly develop a good soil. In a similar way you may remember the spiritual DNA, made up of the four genetic letters Guanine, Cytosine, Thymine and Adenine. They are put together in a double helix structure, which defines what letters correspond and complement another genetic letter, and the very way these letters are arranged will define the organism grows. If we equate, for illustration's sake, those four genetic letters with the four ministries evangelism, prophecy, teaching and pastoring, this creative act of putting them together in the right order would fall into the responsibility of the apostle, God's "master builder."

## 5. Housechurch or Cellchurch?

*Thirteen reasons why housechurches are the natural solution*

David Yonggi Cho, Pastor of Yoido Full Gospel Church in Seoul, Korea, has made the cell group system world famous. In more recent times, it was due to the material published by *Ralph Neighbour, Jr., William Beckham, Larry Kreider, Larry Stockstill* and others, that the concept of "cell church" has gained worldwide momentum. "*Cells form the basic unit of the Cell Church*", says Neighbour. All or most members of a "cell based church" are part of a small group or cell, usually meeting once a week, and typically meet additionally in a celebration, a large gathering usually lead by a "Senior Pastor". Structurally the Cell Church forms a pyramid, with the Senior Pastor on top, followed by assistant pastors, regional and zonal pastors, "down" to the cell leaders with their respective cell leader assistants.

Although I seem to share with many of my contemporaries an inbuilt aversion against "top-down-language" and all too elaborate systems and plan A's and B's for all eventualities, I can wholeheartedly agree with Ralph Neighbour's diagnostic view of much of the traditional church in the first chapters of his book "Where do we go from here". He points out to the programme-drivenness of a meeting and event oriented church as one of the core culprits, replacing life fellowship with running the "right" agendas and having exciting programmes. Neighbour then goes on in his substantial book to explain in detail many aspects of a cell-based church. He suggest, for example, to structure cell meetings around the 4 W's, *welcome, worship, words and works*. The welcome is an icebreaker to get people involved; the worship is about meditations, readings or songs; the word is the application of last Sunday's sermon, and works means to reach out practically to the "oikos", the immediate circle of friends and relationships a person has.

However, I do share more than only a daunting feeling with many insiders and observers of the Cell Church movement today: could the unthinkable happen, that the Cell Church has developed many excellent programmes to prevent itself from becoming a programme based design, *and in so doing has become what it fears most - namely a programme based design?*

### God's hand in the Cell Church movement

I want to leave no doubt about it: I clearly see the hand of God in the Cell Church and related movements. I believe God is the prime initiator of a paradigm shift and resulting changes in terms of church of such radical and global proportions, that many of us would be simply shocked or startled, if we were to see the whole picture. I myself readily agree that what I write here is only a small part of the whole truth, and needs the complementary work and input of many others. "*I do know in parts*", very much so. The impending changes will be so immense, that even many contemporary prophets will be ill prepared. I agree that it is difficult to swallow the whole issue and

implications of housechurches in one big bite, let alone simply take them serious and implement them by tomorrow night.

But God is a gentle global teacher, he teaches us step by step, first ABC, than DEF, and finally XYZ. Through the Cell Church he teaches a return to smallness in a language that many traditional programme based churches can and do understand quite well. The fact that the Cell Church itself clearly carries some genes of a programme based design does not really disturb me, since I see that this can serve as a beautiful bridge of understanding for those yet to cross the river back from organized cathedral type religion to an organic and relational understanding of the church as a way of life, at home where we are at home. In this sense, I see the Cell Church as one of God's half-way houses, giving some limited focus and vision, so that we in our own limitations can better glimpse the way ahead. It may be also God's gracious hand to slow down our traditional and global church bus to negotiate the more radical bend to housechurch Christianity ahead. If we do not slow down by warning signs we actually understand and heed, we would be ill prepared and possibly overturned at the corner with disastrous results. God does not want to overturn us and create chaos, but help us to negotiate the future, and therefore sometimes has to slow us down to prepare us for what he sees, but we don't. Often our very own over-activistic mentality does this nicely, and in times of "burn-out" and break-downs many new prophetic insights have been born, because we had the time to pray and think, to again be quiet and still before the Lord.

I find it necessary to point out, that I have seen and heard about numerous "cell church" movements or national adaptations of a cell church idea which are functioning much more like housechurches. I am only too happy about it. My intention here is not to create an artificial division at all, but to point out a spectrum and a continuum of a reformation process, of which, I am convinced, the Cell Church is an important part of.

I am in great sympathy with the Cell Church, because I completely share the concern of developing a New Testament church, a working structure that truly disciples people and ultimately disciples nations. My intention here is not at all to create an artificial polarization, but to point out some key differences between the House Church and the Cell Church concept. For that purpose I have listed some key differences between the two systems, knowing that there are many models and structures developing today, and necessarily there will be some variations and even overlaps between the two:

Core differences	Cell Church	House Church
1. philosophy	"Chieftdom"	acephalous, headless tribe
2. reflects	city culture	village culture
3. flourishes in	warrior nations	peaceful nations also
4. cell is	part of larger unit	the unit itself
5. administration	Jethro system	5-fold ministry
6. programme	agenda driven	housechurch is the agenda
7. structure	pyramid	flat
8. leadership	leaders ladder	elders and apostles
9. centre	headquartered	decentralized
10. celebration	must	optional
11. visibility	high	low
12. setup	evangelistic	apostolic and prophetic
13. "big wing" is	denominational church	the city Church



### *1. Chiefdoms and acephalous tribes*

If we compare cell churches and housechurches, they might simply echo the age old distinction between chiefdoms, tribes with a headman, and acephalous or headless tribes. Cell churches would then reflect the chiefdom pattern, housechurches the makeup of the headless tribal societies.

### *2. City and village culture*

Many of today's Cell Churches have developed in cities or metropolitan areas, whereby housechurches have flourished in both contexts, cities and villages. Most Cell Churches are city-bred. I think this is important to note. Although, some have contended, the story of redemption starts in the garden of Eden and ends in the new city of Jerusalem, many people today do simply live in both worlds at the same time, the city and the village. A person might dwell in a city, but still live in a village within the city, his colony, barangay, apartment block, gated community, slum or neighborhood quarter. The Cell Church offers a visible island in the urban sea of humanity, a castle rising above the masses, where people can seek and find refuge under a standard bearer's flag or in the shadow of a great man of God. This is one application of the Cell Church model which may not always be the case. It is true that many people in cities seem socially lost, without identity, waiting for someone to come along to offer them a place to belong. But that is only true on the surface. Underneath, many people even in cities actually "do belong" already, to a club, a clan, a group of all sorts, a gang, a modern "tribe", or feel a strong part of their geographic location, their apartment block or neighborhood watch group, for example. They still have their tribe, their village, even within the city. Almost all nations - with the obvious exception of typical city-nations like Singapore or the Vatican, retain most of their heritage, typical life patterns and cultural traditions and strongholds in the village. Many nations are increasingly aware and proud of that. "India lives in a village", exclaimed Mahatma Gandhi. But what if the church in India, for example, lives in the cities? Can a city church disciple villages? The statistics say no. The consequences are simple enough: a church developed in the city, on average, will not win the villages. If we do not win the villages, we will not disciple the whole nation. As much as we need to "win the cities" - which we could also see as a huge network of villages and neighborhoods - we need the type of church which can penetrate and win the villages, too. If we can disciple the neighborhoods, we can also disciple the nation. The housechurches seem to be able to do both.

### *3. War and peace*

Some tribes are traditional warrior tribes, like the African Maasai, the Japanese or the Norwegian Vikings, while others have a more peaceful mindset and history like the Dravidians of South India, the Finns, the Filipinos or the Kalahari Bushmen. Some nations have developed, more than others, a warrior culture, others are simply more peaceloving and settler minded. This is expressed in the way they see their nation, see themselves as individuals, in the films they produce, in the role of the army or the law,

and whether they like have a king or a president. In some countries many people simply have come to expect others to tell them what to do, in other countries that same behavior would be highly offensive. In some countries people are highly formal and ritualistic, in others extremely low key and cordial. Some countries feel as if you enter an army camp, with tight controls from top to bottom, where nobody moves without prior permission; other countries are more like a camping ground, a loosely organized and quite a pleasurable mess. In many western countries individualism - from the times of Thomas Aquinas in the 13th century - and democracy is valued above all else, where each person is in charge of his own life, while in other nations individuals feel much more part of the "Ummah", the tight-knit community, and others are generally in charge of their lives. Churches growing in particular cultures and nations always reflect, to a high degree, this "war or peace" mentality. A person growing up in a "warrior" culture will much more expect and accept that others tell him where to sit and belong, what to do and how to behave. From childhood his life will be filled with little rituals and ceremonies, ribbons and badges, titles and climbing carrier ladders, and there will be always a standard bearer to which he should rally. What wonder if he expects the same in church. The Cell Church, I believe, reflects that pattern, and rightfully so. However, people growing up with a peaceful, democratic, socialist or even communist background have something in common with today's X-Generation culture in the West: they will instinctively question any self-imposing authority, be it political, economical, or spiritual. They will resist a church with a "military touch and a spiritual general on top", and value an organic and relational church with servant leadership. This is one more reason why I favor housechurches. They effectively function in both "war and peace" climates.

#### *4. Interdependent status*

Where the cell is an important part of a larger individual church, it "belongs" structurally, for example, to the Yoido Full Gospel Church in Seoul or the Faith Community Baptist Church in Singapore. The housechurch does not organizationally "belong" to a larger unit in that sense. It is usually part of an interdependent - not independent! - network of similar housechurches, or, often in cases of heavy restrictions on Christianity, functions completely on its own. They are not part of a larger, "real" or denominational church, they are the real thing all by themselves.

#### *5. Jethro or the Five-fold ministry*

In tune with a stunning absence of the fivefold ministry, many Cell Churches favor the so-called Jethro-principle, a system of administration which delegates authority to several levels of leadership. Jethro, Moses' father in law, advised him (Ex.18) to delegate judging the people of Israel to "rulers and officials over thousands, hundreds, fifties and ten", because otherwise he would be overworked. What we should not fail to notice, however, is that the Jethro-principle is basically a policing structure enforcing law and order, not designed to build and empower the New Testament fellowship of grace and love. Moses was a mediator between the people of Israel and

God, and this is exactly what Jesus did away with, as he himself became the mediator once and for all, opening access to the throne of grace for all people washed by the blood of the Lamb. Are we actually trying to do the new in the power of the old? In a Cell Church the unquestioned leader is typically of a Moses type, the "Senior Pastor" with his "cabinet of Ministers", delegating his authority to a myriad of levels of responsibility and leadership with quite an enormous amount of counting, administration, bureaucracy, and, may I say it, control. This appears to me like a protestant attempt in Catholicism, a protestant emulation of an episcopal and hierarchical system. Is it a Freudian lapse when we read in "Church Growth and the Home Cell System" (Seoul, page 122) that *"every week new souls are being added to the central computer"*? What does it do to a person's Ego to know that he or she is number 5.432 in the tracking system of the church computer I do not know. What I do know is this: few people want to be run and tracked by others, and live a life where every move is controlled and observed by the watchful eye of "Big Brother". I have been proudly introduced into a number of large computer operating rooms of Cell Churches as if it were the "Holy of Holies". Sometimes I walked away with the feeling that the greatest unspoken fear of this church is that someone might fail to do his duty, walk out of line, the senior pastor fall ill or die, the electricity fail, or a computer virus creep in, and the whole church fall apart in an instant.

*"The growth of the (Cell) Church should only be limited by our anointing and vision"*, says Lawrence Khong, and Markus Koch, working with *the Christliches Zentrum Buchegg*, a Cell Church in Zürich, Switzerland, goes on to suggest that *"a church should be led by one pastor"*. This traditional one pastor-centred thinking does not differ much from the congregational model of church at all. In fact, the very life and quality of the church would depend very highly on the quality, vision and energy of the Senior Pastor. Knowing many christian leaders - and myself! - I am not only suggesting that any of them can go astray, but that we should not build too much on just one person's charisma. But the "stock" of senior pastors available today is quite limited, too. In every nation the number of persons with the caliber of a Lawrence Khong, Yonggi Cho, Ralph Neighbour, Kriensak Chareonwonsak, William Kumuyi, Gerald Coates, Max Schläpfer, D. Mohan, Bill Hybels and Cesar Castellanos is simply limited. They may be not really just "Senior Pastors" at all, but truly people with an apostolic gifting and calling much larger than their current setup, and should and will probably not confine themselves just to "their own church" in the future or even now.

A housechurch, in contrast to all this, is much less threatened by an electrical power cut, because there is not much data to lose. The elders of housechurches are in relationship with people doing the five-fold ministry, through which God empowers, anoints and encourages others to do the work of the ministry. This fivefold ministry functions much like a blood-circulating system amongst the housechurch-"cells", is low key and quite invisible. The idea is not delegating authority top-down to build an ever-increasing pyramid touching the sky, but empowering each other to spread out and generate a movement which can fit under a carpet.

6. *Do we have a programme, or "are we the programme"?*

In a typical Cell Church there is an agenda to accomplish and a fairly set pattern to follow for each cell. This agenda could be handed to the "cell leader" on a sheet from the Senior Pastor or a responsible person, or discussed with the cell leaders on Wednesday in order to rehearse for the cell meetings on Thursday, or the agenda might be contained in the agreed upon pattern for such meetings. Yonggi Cho advises other ministers ". . . *never to delegate the important responsibility of writing the teaching lessons and having seminars with the homecell leaders to others*".

In contrast, the housechurch ideally is the agenda itself. Since a housechurch is typically part of an apostolic network within which the five-fold ministry is operating, it is prevented from becoming a pious bless-me club or an isolated social club or a fellowship with koinonitis, that is a form of "fellowship-infection" of an inward looking and self-centered christian group, not by a programme, but by the way it functions and relates to other housechurches. Although Christians in housechurches read and discuss the Bible, it is not a Bible study; although they pray, it is not a prayer meeting. Since Jesus is a person, the idea of having each meeting with that person structured around the same old pattern seems to be as creative and inventive as a bridegroom bringing his future bride each day the same set of flowers, singing the same songs, and declaring his ardent love with the same poems. I suspect after a short time she would be less than excited to receive him and listen to his programme.

Much of the programme-drivenness of the traditional church stems from the fact that most meetings are usually arranged in such a way that there can be no (unpleasant!?) surprises, like "lay people" exercising gifts to the embarrassment of a religious professional; for the very fear of something going terribly wrong, many of them have developed democratic forms of administration. Democracy may look like the safest form of church government, but it has proven to be the very one which quickly leads into spiritual oblivion and facelessness, because it has the ability to block out prophetic direction in the name of the numerical majority. Usually it introduces bureaucracy as the most inhumane and legalistic form of administration by accountants who will make sure that the letter of the law is followed. It is yes or no. Instead of people symbolically sitting in the Garden of Eden under the tree of life, we end up all sitting - and arguing! - under the tree of knowledge of good and evil, and who is right becomes more important than who we are in Christ. Church programmes then start to become fool proof, follow an agreed-upon pattern (unpack the guitar and songbooks, sing, pray, listen to a bible study or sermon, pray again, close the meeting), where simply nothing can go wrong. In such a context, I suspect, not much can go right, either. Nothing is wrong with singing, praying and having Bible study in itself. But if it becomes the dominating programme whenever Christians meet, it will soon become a tradition. This is also why a preoccupation with Bible studies or even prayer can easily kill a healthy community, because it values and emphasizes one agenda over the others. This ultimately attracts and involves people quickly into a programme, which is easy for the first few months, but then not only generates the need to go on inventing follow-up programmes to the last follow-up programme, but starts to actually wear and burn out the people. *"When we realized this with a shock,*

*we closed down all our prayer meetings*", says Pastor *D. Mohan* of the 12,000 member Assemblies of God Church in Madras, India.

In a housechurch the idea is to come together in order to be together in the presence of Jesus, who, yes, might very well have an agenda for the asking, and will gladly reveal it through his Holy Spirit and anyone present with a prophetic ministry (1. Cor. 14:26-29: "*When you come together ... two or three prophets should speak.*") The core reason Christians come together is to share and transfer life, and since life is not predictable, their meetings are not really predictable either. That this very issue of unpredictability makes housechurches more attractive, at least for teenagers, may be a pleasant sideeffect.

An agenda can potentially even harm or prevent community and fellowship, because it may introduce an overriding focus to the community and squeeze it mechanically into a predefined direction. The very agenda-drivenness of Cell Church introduces a condition, and conditional fellowship is limited fellowship. Many such programmes or agendas develop because Christians are told that their meetings are for evangelistic purposes and reasons. This evangelistic structure carries and inbuilt evangelistic pressure to perform, which accounts for much of the startling burn-out figures of Cell Churches.

Programmes can, however, sometimes serve as a temporary method of ingraining a mentality or a pattern of behavior into people. Once they have achieved that, the programme can be discarded and life can go on. I heard about one of the best of such programmes for cell meetings from my friend *Steve Dixon* of the cell-based Kings Church in Slough (UK). They call it L.I.F.E.: L stands for dealing with life issues, I for intercession, F for Fun, fellowship and food, and E for evangelism.

Rather than seeing church or cell groups as "a series of programme driven weekly meetings at 7.30 PM at Elms street", housechurches do see their essence as sharing lives, and could meet everyday like in biblical days, or any other number of times suitable. Here, the people are the resources, Jesus is the programme, fellowship is the reason, multiplication is the outcome, and discipling the neighborhood the goal.

### *7. Pyramid or flat structure*

Most everything that man touches - buildings, companies, politics, grows into a bigger and higher structure, with any amount of levels, stairs and pyramid schemes. Beyond the Tabernacle, which was a tent, the Temple was the only building God ever designed, and it was flat, not multi-storied. The Cell church usually develops quickly into a pyramid structure with the Senior Pastor on top, followed downwards by Assistant Pastors, Directors of Pastoral Care Departments, District Pastors, Sub-District Pastors, Section Leaders and finally, at the bottom, the Home Cell Leaders with their Assistant Home Cell leader and Spiritual Parents. The housechurch has, in comparison, a flat structure. The various tasks are not executed by people within a hierarchy, but by people uniquely gifted for a special ministry relating to each other as redeemed friends and submitting themselves to each other. In the New Testament

there is no inferiority or superiority amongst members of the church, but equality: no one is more important than the others (1 Cor. 12:21-25), but everyone has to simply fulfill a different function within the Body. Ministry is therefore not delegated top-down but earned through a spirit of humble servanthood. There are three main areas of responsibility:

- a. The housechurches are led by *Elders*;
- b. the elders are constantly equipped and trained by people who have been called by God for one of the *five-fold ministries*;
- c. Those spiritual equippers are relating to what I call *apostolic regional fathers*, people with an apostolic and prophetic gifting plus a special calling from God for a city, a region or a nation. Those apostolic fathers, usually recognizable by the almost unbearable agony and spiritual pain they bear for a place, a city, a nation or a people group, become the local backbone, the regional or national "pillars of faith", anchoring the whole movement of housechurches and being responsible for any celebrations and the city-church that will emerge.

The housechurch is typically part of an interdependent (not: independent) network, a truly selfregulating system of interrelated elements or clusters of elements. "*The biotic principle of interdependence states that the way the individual parts are integrated into a whole system is more important than the parts themselves. This is nature's blueprint: structured interdependence*", says Christian Schwarz.

The structure is flat, because there is no-one "higher" or more important than the other person. This also has consequences for the potential corruption with money and power in the church, from which the traditional church is not exactly free and immune, because it is not all that impressing to be the humble elder of 13 others or to simply serve a number of housechurches as a teacher, pastor or evangelist.

#### *8. Led or fathered*

In spite of Jesus' stern words "*do not let anyone call you a leader, for one is your leader, Christ*" (Mt 23:10), one of the greatest cries of today's church is for more leaders. We humans love leaders, and chuckle knowingly when we drink out of a coffee mug that reads the slogan: Lead, follow, or get out of the way. As always, when we ignore a biblical principle, there is a price to pay. Like in the days of Saul God wanted to be King of the Israelites, but the nation wanted to rather follow the ways of the nations and have a decent king. Today we are in the same danger. The whole world wants leaders, not servants, and so does the traditional church. Maybe we simply want what God is not willing to give, and instead of seeing our futile attempts, we carry on with what we think is persistence. Just like a human body the Body of Christ has not many leaders, but simply many different members, all with different functions. As those members function together in collective obedience to their head, so the whole Body is literally lead by the head. To call one member a leader over the

others - and in spite of the presence of the head! - would be grossly misleading. Jesus is the head of the church, and that is all the leadership it truly needs. The church is lead when it's members obey it's head. The Church experiences leadership as they collectively obey their head and function together in unity.

*No leadership awards in heaven*

If we want to see biblical - and not political or management type - leadership to happen, we must stop to blindly assuming and usurping leadership of the church, as if it is the most natural thing to do. Man assumes leadership to anything he touches. It is part of his creational brief. However, the church is an exception, because it is not man's invention nor property. It is truly God's. This is something which runs so contrary to our human thinking, that supernatural faith in a God who has things under control when they long seem to have slipped out of our hands is simply required to be true and faithful stewards of his church. That is also why God is mainly reigning his church through apostolic and prophetic people who usually have the charismatic gift of faith more than others. *Rick Warren*, senior pastor of Saddleback Community Church says it this way: "*For a church to grow, both the pastor and the people must give up control.*"

Leadership in the political sense of assuming the last responsibility, filling a ministry slot and function within a job description within a programme, or to take on some delegated authority from someone else, is simply not good enough for the church. This will choke it's development like Saul choked Israel, or bygone bishops who behaved like little kings choked the development of the Church and led them into plain meaningless and religious chiefdoms. The Body of Christ requires humble and faithful stewards, functioning in obedience to Christ and in mutual love, respect and submission to each other, not highly professional and individual great "leaders" in their own right, who build their little kingdoms around their personality or personal gifting for some time. The Church requires Christ-like stewards managing God's *oikonomia* or household well, who know that they themselves are led by Christ, who is neither dominating and order-giving nor works with assistants, but has absolute faith in his father and has *therefore* been entrusted with the world.

Cell Churches are very leader-intensive; they require leadership at many levels. Housechurches, in contrast, are basically *not lead, but fathered*. A Cell group usually has a leader and an assistant leader, a housechurch has an elder. There is a huge difference. I am the father and husband of a small family, but few would call me the leader of my family.

*It is simply part of a fathers brief to lead, but it is not necessarily part of a leaders brief to father.* The nature of housechurches are spiritual extended families, extension centres of the heavenly fathers heart, who expresses his passionate heart for his children through special people whose hearts are beating to the rhythm of God's own passion. No church in the New Testament is said to be "led" by a pastor or any other leader; but there are always god-ordained persons - stewards - who are carrying a

special responsibility for the church, namely the elders, the apostles and prophets. Again, this does not mean that they are leaders. Few would turn to a steward to ask for his business card. The stewards of the Church are servants, and the more they serve, the more they will ultimately lead (Lk 22:6) in a way which is upside-down to the way the world expects leadership. An obedient and humble servant can lead because he is lead. Leadership, if at all, is therefore a function of obedience. Many housechurch movements in the world have no leaders in the political sense; they are served by anointed stewards, who function very much like spiritual fathers and mothers, as in the case of Yuan Allen in Beijing, the "Father" of the Chinese Housechurch movement.

For a Cell Church with a pyramid structure and "leaders" trained at every level, it is quite possible that a new professionalism and clericalism enters through the back door. In addition, many Cell Churches have a "leaders ladder", where a person can work himself "up" from assistant cell leader level to assistant to the senior pastor. Quite apart from the danger of possible competition in such a "career structure", it means that a person usually performs his task only for a short time, and then moves on or up. What if God has called a person simply to be an elder, and never fashioned him or her to become assistant senior pastor at all?

#### 9. The headquarters question

The Cell Church usually has quite an impressive headquarter-building, typically as an expression of the unique ministry of its Senior Pastor and his close associates, whereby housechurches are typically a decentralized system with many different centres - that is homes! -, which can change any time if needed. I was reminded of this while speaking recently in Yuan Allens housechurch in Beijing, which is networked invisibly "under the carpet" with many other housechurches. All this happens from a single bedroom with a few chairs and a minute porch, all located in a small alley too narrow for a car to pass through, just behind a bustling market. Housechurches seem to demonstrate more of a flexible pilgrim-mentality, they are on the move, just like God's spirit is on the move. The Cell Churches are more settled down than that, have developed roots and a more or less huge administration structure, and usually broadcast the message that "they are here to stay." One of the negative aspects of a headquarter is that it generates the need for a lot of organizing and administration. The biggest problem with organizing the church is, that it introduces bureaucracy. Bureaucracy is possibly the most dangerous, cruel and inhuman form of administration, because it basically asks only two questions: yes or no. "Did you fill out the form properly, yes or no." A bureaucratic system of administration throws the door wide open for the kind of people who ultimately would account, organize, administrate, manage, sell, run and finally control - and therefore kill - the church. *Howard Astin* in his book "Body and Cell" comments that some Cell Churches feel very "regimented". This can be avoided quite easily in housechurches, because everything here is relational, and therefore things are simply more humane. There is not much more to organize than in living in an extended family. We do not have to assume control of the church as if it were a company which needs "Total Quality



Management”, a modern business philosophy leaving no space for unforeseen developments and ”having all bases covered” for maximum quality and therefore maximum customer satisfaction which means maximum profit. With the Church, we can have a more humble approach, knowing that God is in control. Since there is a head - and naturally a headquarter in heaven - we can relax on earth and have as many small outlets of this heavenly chain of churches as possible, because God does not lose track of them, he does have the final oversight. In frantically trying to help God run his business by establishing visible and impressive cathedrals and headquarters on earth we might, unwillingly, have actually hindered him, because these structures may have shouted glory to men on earth so loud that the glory of the lamb was drowned in the process.

#### *10. The role of Celebrations*

The Cell Church typically requires both sociological sizes, the cell and the celebration, to function well; both are necessary wings of the ”two-winged church”, as Bill Beckham illustrates it. The housechurch can exist independent of celebrations, especially in a hostile environment, and still spread out. They can celebrate through the way they are linked together in an interdependent structure, whereby in the Cell Church the celebration, complete with worship band and preaching by the Senior Pastor, can often become a way back into the very congregational-type structure they have tried to leave behind. The celebrations of Cell Churches often have a denominational character - it is our brand of cell groups that meet in our celebration -, whereby the housechurches favor and support more the regional or citywide celebrations, where the whole local church comes together as the sum total of all Christians in an area. One builds a new denominationalism, the other builds the Kingdom. Which is more biblical?

#### *11. High and low visibility*

As the housechurch can function with or without a celebration and the necessary administrative headquarter to run it, it is obviously much less visible. In many nations or cities, housechurches can function for a long time without being noticed at all by the public. The interdependent network structure of a housechurch movement links the churches ”under the carpet”, through an invisible and flat structure, so that even the celebration happens as the fivefold ministry rotates through the housechurches and carries with it good news, greetings, gifts and vision. This also means that housechurches are less prone to corruption through insecure and therefore power-hungry people attracted by powerful and impressive structures like flies to the honey. This type of Christianity makes a much more humble statement about itself, which is specially important for areas of the world with a lot of religious bigotry, where religious movements outdo each other by who competing to have the highest steeple or tower attached to holy buildings. Low visibility of human structures also means high visibility of God’s hand in all this. Finally, a low visibility structure is much

more persecution-proof and prepared for all apocalyptic eventualities than massive cell churches with a vulnerable top man and a vulnerable hub.

### 12. *Evangelistic or apostolic-prophetic foundations*

Many have understood correctly that Cell Church is an evangelistic model of church. And because many feel that "evangelism is the need of the hour", we might feel prone to go with the flow and build evangelistically. However, as I have pointed out before, the long-term driving force of a church is not its evangelistic vision, but a solid apostolic and prophetic foundation (Eph. 2:20). In this way, the apostolic outward focus and a prophetic vision for the past, the present and the future, is literally built-in. I believe that often the housechurches are "apostolic and prophetic", because this is exactly the way the New Testament apostles and prophets built the church. Evangelists have never played the main role in propagating the church, this has always been the ministry of prophetic and apostolically gifted people. The apostolic and prophetic church as a new way of life is good news in itself, and does not really need evangelism as an activity to be driven by, with all the unhealthy pressure to perform that comes with it.

A good example for this is Argentina, a country that experiences revival roughly since 1982, as they lost a war to England, and as much of its national pride was sunk together with its big flagship, the Belgrano. Gifted Evangelists like *Carlos Annacondia*, *Hector Gimenez* and *Omar Cabrera* sprung up and had massive evangelistic rallies of almost unheard of proportions, counting the "decisions for Christ" by the tens of Thousands. However, I was told that Carlos Annacondia and others have honestly asked themselves: "*Where are all those people we lead to Christ now?*" Omar Cabrera, in a Dawn-related conference in Miami in November 1998, pointed out that many pastors in Argentina - including himself - have found it difficult to incorporate the many who made "decisions for Christ" into existing or newly planted churches. Argentina, as a study done in Sept. 1996 revealed, has one of the lowest churchplanting rates of all of Latinamerica. All that "Extraction Evangelism" as I call it, trying to extract individuals from their families through an individual and purely verbal "decision for Christ" is not only breaking existing social structures and is therefore hated by parents of converted children around the world, but has not lead to much growth of the church, either. There must be a missing link. "*Evangelism which pulls individuals out of their family context and provides no new context is half-baked and may well do more harm than good*", says Alan Tippet. Argentinean Alberto de Luca, together with a growing number of pastors, sees churchplanting and multiplication as the prophetic way forward. They are developing now a national church-multiplication strategy. In other words, they move from being Evangelism driven to function in an apostolic and prophetic way to see their country disciplined. Good evangelism supports and functions in unity with the five-fold ministry, never isolated as a single force or cure-all for the lost or unheard witness of the church.

I have mentioned before that the Cell Church seems to be an urban product, a model of church grown in the city or a metropolitan climate. The city develops a particular

culture, much different from the villages. In a village, each person is directly responsible for his actions. In an atmosphere of tight social control he cannot escape because everybody knows everybody. In a city, however, an individual quickly drowns in an anonymous mass and may start to feel that he does not have to stand up for the consequences of his actions, because he can always disappear into the faceless crowd. The city breeds a philosophy of its own, of a "hit and run" approach, where any salesman understands that he needs to quickly touch as many people as he can with his product, because next moment they are gone. This philosophy has molded much of today's evangelistic thinking, and much of today's evangelistic thinking has, in turn, flown into the Cell Church approach. But as long as the church thinks the evangelists are the prophets, the true prophets will be overheard.

### 13. How big is big?

Bill Beckham introduces a helpful picture of the church: the bird with two wings. The one wing is the cell structure, the small gatherings of believers, the other wing is the big worship service, the celebration. A one-winged church, one with only a celebration-worship service, where the cell-system was lost in the sand of Church history, is a restricted creature, only flies in circles, and cannot really soar like an eagle any more. It therefore needs, he concludes, a second wing. I completely agree. However, the core difference between housechurch and Cell Church in this regard is, that Cell Churches typically develop a "branded", a denominational type of "celebration", a "Faith Community Baptist Church" - Celebration. The natural second wing for the housechurches is the City Church, ideally the whole body of Christ of a city or an area, who meet and celebrate in biggest possible numbers regularly or irregularly without a denominational label, just as the Christians of the city coming together and acting as one body.

### Transitioning for ever?

One of the most striking aspects of cell churches is that most of them seem to be constantly "in transition". Transition could easily become the outstanding constant of the Cell Church movement. Lawrence Khong of Faith Community Baptist Church, Singapore, a passionate and visionary man of God, mentioned in a recent brochure that they are now (1998) "in their 10<sup>th</sup> year of transitioning." In my view, Cell Churches have done only half a paradigm shift, have not fully concluded the circle and not finished the "second reformation" quite yet. But they are a brilliant start into the right direction, given the fact that a large part of churches in the world are build according to the congregational model of church.

I believe that God wants us to go full circle, returning back wholeheartedly to the New Testament God and consequently his model of housechurches, incarnated in apostolic and prophetic ways into our soil, time, people group and culture, because God one more time wants to turn the world upside down.

### Lamb or Lion?

In biblical revelation, we meet Jesus in many forms; one of them is the Lamb of God, and one is the Lion of Judah. My impression is, that housechurches are much more "Lamb", much more fragile and vulnerable in nature than the Cell Church, which sometimes reminds me more of a Lion, a kingly structure. We all know there will be the time when Jesus will come back as the world ruler and establish his dominion visibly. But we are not quite there, yet. In the here-and-now, we are experiencing the Messianic Kingdom, but in many ways, we still do not yet experience it fully. We are strong in weakness, the meek shall inherit the earth, lasting things for the Kingdom of God are accomplished "not by might and power, but by my Spirit". In housechurches, as I hope we all see, so many things can go wrong, and probably will go wrong. If anything positive happens and is achieved through housechurches, the ultimately glory will not go to an ingenious system, a phantastic human pastor, an anointed concept, but to the Lamb of God himself, who has done the humanly impossible and seen through his lambs safely into the final Kingdom. Like Himself, they have been beaten, ridiculed, mocked, harmed, and maybe crucified on earth. But they will rule for ever in His Kingdom to come.

## 6. Developing a persecution-proof structure

*"Blessed are you when you are persecuted": how to develop a persecution proof spirit and thrive under pressure*

As much as people loved him, the life of Jesus was almost always threatened. He was a stumbling block to the religious leaders, to the political leaders, and He upset and challenged the nice business-driven world of the civilized and ordinary citizens to the core. As a result, He was questioned, threatened, tempted, tricked, persecuted and finally betrayed, captured and killed. The miracle is, that He survived it all, he was "proof" to all this suffering. In fact, He survived even his own death.

His disciples lived in a world of fierce and brutal religious persecution, were in and out of jails, had little academic education, did not call massive church buildings or mission headquarters their own, had, at one point, favor in the eyes of the public, and, in the other moment, were feverishly persecuted and had no foundations and donors to appeal to for financial support. Still, Jesus told them to go and make disciples of all nations.

Jesus must have known something which we sometimes are in the danger to overlook. His own ability to survive, His supernatural power to live, to achieve His purposes against all possible odds, His own resilience, was to be built into the church, His Body on Earth. Maybe Jesus foresaw that His church had fascinating and God-given supernatural abilities: it can thrive on chaos, blossom in the darkness, be rich in poverty, grow in the desert, flourish under pressure, and sing in jail.

Where do we look for inspiration?

Many insights, lessons and advice for Church Growth or Churchplanting on the market today come from the non-persecuted churches rather than the persecuted church. Not that there is nothing to learn from peacefully settled down churches, far from it. But statistical evidence and missionary research, I like the once carried out by *David Barrett* and his associates, shows that the church grew and still grows most vigorously under a certain level of persecution and affliction. As *Mao Tse Tung* closed out all western Missionaries in 1949 in China, the church began to be persecuted - and grew like never before. According to some researchers, now up to 10% of China is evangelical, the largest single evangelical block in the world. Similar observations come from Ethiopia, Russia, Vietnam, Sudan and Cuba. But the eyes of the church are often where the eyes of the world are, too: on Dow Jones indexes, and the centres of political and economic power. Many want to learn from the powerful how to *dominate* the world; only few people want to learn from the meek how to *inherit* the earth.

As a result, many Church Growth and Church Planting lessons from Djibouti, for example, go down unnoticed, because most Christians do not even know where Djibouti is. They know about Wheaton, Pasadena and Colorado Springs, Brownsville, Toronto, Oslo, Rome, Stuttgart, London and Bern, and consequently learn lessons from the teachers to whom they look up to.

In 1998, German Evangelist *Ulrich Parzany* received a medal for his outstanding achievements in the area of youth work in Germany. In his response he said: *"They crucified my boss Jesus Christ. I am being honored. What did I do wrong?"*

Jesus sent us as lambs amongst the wolves, not as wolves amongst the lambs. This means that there are lessons to learn from the lambs who have been amongst the wolves. That also means, *that it is difficult, if not impossible, to preach the message of redemption from a position of power.* More and more Christians are realizing today that there is power in weakness, strength in humbleness, and a powerful mission agency is a contradiction of terms.

### Thank God for pressure

Paul's words, "indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted," (2. Tim 3:12) seem to be valid for another place and another time, maybe another world. However, Jesus said in Matthew 5:10-12: *"Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when men cast insults at you, and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely, on account of Me. Rejoice, and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you."*

Today we are in the danger of turning those words on their heads, and defining blessings and curse according to the patterns of the world, not according to the values of an upside-down Kingdom of God. We feel we are blessed when we are successful and remunerated, honored and quoted, given seats of honor, and when we are admired and glide painfree through a "peaceful and safe life without problems". We behave as if religious freedom is a status of blessing, and persecution is inherently bad, and may even pray to the very God who sent the persecution to "kindly protect us from it."

### Three kinds of persecution

There are three kinds of persecution: *external*, by national or local government, or other religious groups; *internal*, whereby Christians are fighting and persecuting each other, withholding blessing from each other, and filling up countries with "angry brothers" (Mt 5:22-24); thirdly and probably worst of all, *no persecution at all*, because the church is not worth being persecuted at all; it's values and it's lifestyle has blended with a godless society, the salt has become saltless and is simply trodden under the feet of society unnoticed.

In this regard it is helpful to reexamine the role of persecution and suffering in regard to the church. Some insights stand out:

1. Jesus was persecuted because he did not keep religious laws

John 5:16 *"And for this reason the Jews were persecuting Jesus, because He was doing these things on the Sabbath."*

2. Christians are supposed to have enemies in order to love them

Matthew 5:44 *"But I say to you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you"*

Romans 12:14 *"Bless those who persecute you; bless and curse not."*

3. Jesus predicted persecution

Matthew 10:23 *"But whenever they persecute you in this city, flee to the next; for truly I say to you, you shall not finish going through the cities of Israel, until the Son of Man comes."*

Matthew 13:21 *"yet he has no firm root in himself, but is only temporary, and when affliction or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he falls away."*

Luke 21:12 *"But before all these things, they will lay their hands on you and will persecute you, delivering you to the synagogues and prisons, bringing you before kings and governors for My name's sake."*

John 15:20 *"Remember the word that I said to you, 'A slave is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you; if they kept My word, they will keep yours also."*

4. Persecution is not an extraordinary but a normal part of Christian experience, of "all those who desire to live godly"

Romans 8:35 *"Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?"*

1 Cor. 4:12 *"and we toil, working with our own hands; when we are reviled, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure;"*

2 Thess. 1:4 *"therefore, we ourselves speak proudly of you among the churches of God for your perseverance and faith in the midst of all your persecutions and afflictions which you endure."*

2 Tim. 3:11-12 *"persecutions, and sufferings, such as happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium and at Lystra; what persecutions I endured, and out of them all the Lord delivered me! And indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted."*

5. Persecution is a blessing, not a curse

Mark 10:30 *"But that he shall receive a hundred times as much now in the present age, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and farms, along with persecutions; and in the age to come, eternal life."*

2 Cor. 12:10 *"Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong."*

6. Jesus identifies with the persecuted church

Acts 9:4-5 *"and he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" And he said, "Who art Thou, Lord?" And He said, "I am Jesus whom you are persecuting."*

Acts 22:7-8 *"and I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?' And I answered, 'Who art Thou, Lord?' And He said to me, 'I am Jesus the Nazarene, whom you are persecuting.'"*

Acts 26:14-15 *"And when we had all fallen to the ground, I heard a voice saying to me in the Hebrew dialect, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.' "And I said, 'Who art Thou, Lord?' And the Lord said, 'I am Jesus whom you are persecuting.'"*

7. Persecution has a long history

Exodus 1:12 *"But the more they afflicted them, the more they multiplied and the more they spread out, so that they were in dread of the sons of Israel."*

Acts 7:52 *"Which one of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who had previously announced the coming of the Righteous One, whose betrayers and murderers you have now become;"*

8. The gospel spreads because of persecution

Acts 11:19 *"So then those who were scattered because of the persecution that arose in connection with Stephen made their way to Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, speaking the word to no one except to Jews alone."*

9. Avoiding persecution can be avoiding the cross

Galatians 5:11 *"But I, brethren, if I still preach circumcision, why am I still persecuted? Then the stumbling block of the cross has been abolished."*

Galatians 6:12 *"Those who desire to make a good showing in the flesh try to compel you to be circumcised, simply that they may not be persecuted for the cross of Christ."*



When the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church

It has been pointed out countless times that persecution helps the church to be pure, holy, pay and pray the price, helps it from being less concerned with luxurious issues, and that the blood of the martyrs has always been - and still is - the seed of the church. We can draw at least three important conclusions for the housechurches:

**1. Persecution is normal, peace is the exemption.**

If the Kingdom of God is conflicting at the deepest possible level with the Kingdom of this world, disturbances and conflicts or even a state of war are the necessary outcome. At this present stage of history, God's Kingdom *and "the world under the rule of the evil one"* are simply not compatible, unreconcilable, they are like water and fire. Jesus came to destroy the works of the evil one, and this will not happen in diplomatic peace talks. The Church as Jesus' Body on earth will be drawn into this conflict. Persecution, therefore, is business as usual for the churches, peace and harmony the exception.

**2. Persecution reforms quality (content) and structure of Christianity, and therefore restores apostolic church patterns**

Jesus says *"Love your enemies"*. Many Pastors know that even after many hours of motivational sermons as well as bible studies, few Christians truly manage to love their friendly neighbors, let alone the unfriendly ones. Persecution changes all this by regularly upsetting the *Status Quo* and changing comfortably settled-in Christians into pilgrims; it uproots complacency and restores the pioneer spirit, it liberates Christians from their let-us-build-a-big-castle mentality and involves them in a movement. The command of Jesus "to be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8) was only reaching beyond Jerusalem after God allowed persecution (Acts 8:1-4). This restores the Church back into the likeness of its persecuted founder, Jesus Christ. Jesus said: "Blessed are you when you are persecuted." Persecution, therefore, restores back an amount of "blessedness", which in itself is a quality, God is gifting the church with.

This has also structural consequences, because during persecution the church needs "to live out of suitcases," needs to have a "moveable structure", live and grow in a flexible tent rather than a solid immovable structure meant to stay here forever; needs to have forms that are dynamic, readily adaptable to any change. The housechurch perfectly fits this description.

Sometimes persecution may be God's last word to a sleepy church which has afforded the luxury of overhearing all the apostolic and prophetic wake-up calls in the past. Persecution is a wake-up call few will be able to overhear. This way God may bring back a mentality of urgency and mission, and restore the apostolic nature back to the church. As they are scattered, they again might go *and "preach*

*the word wherever they went*" (Acts 8:4), which is what they should have done in the first place.

### 3. Persecution purifies the agenda of the church

A settled-down, streamlined church that is absorbed within its own culture will soon develop values, priorities, habits and agendas, that are not in line with God's priorities of upsetting the *Status Quo* by introducing the Kingdom of God.

The Early Church had few of the projects, they may be social, political, ecological, evangelistic or holistic the church engages itself in today, and it still grew and flourished. In times of persecution, the agenda of the church is simply reduced to absolute Kingdom-essentials: spreading itself thin and carrying on to be the yeast that leavens the dough and keep on discipling the nations. A degree of persecution also helps to prevent corruption in the church, because no one wants to be much of a king or a star in a secret half-legal society of fairly unimpressive little groups.

#### Standing in good company

We must find a healthy way between unhealthy glorifying persecution like the Early Church Father Irenaeus who reportedly even "lusted for the beasts in Rome", or appealing for every discrimination as Christians to the Human Rights Commission of the United Nations, the secretaries of the World Evangelical Fellowship or the local newspaper. We need to see persecution and its purposes from God's perspective, which may be different from our own feelings and desires. We simply need to be prepared to stand joyfully in the company of the main accused, Jesus Christ Himself. If any person who yields some amount of religious, political or economical power today, still truly begins to understand the total claims of Jesus Christ - and rejects it, he will naturally join in the age old cry: "We do not want him to rule over us, crucify him!" (Lk 19:14 and 23:20) - and with him all those who carry his name.

#### The message of 40 million martyrs

At the time of the death of Stephen (Acts 7), a reported 2.000 Christians were martyred in Jerusalem, writes *F.L. Plotter* in his book "Martyrs in all Ages." Philip, after a revival happened in Phrygia, was imprisoned, bound and hanged. Matthew was reportedly martyred in Ethiopia. James, the brother of Jesus, as an old man of 96 was thrown from the pinnacle of the temple and stoned, and after that his brains got dashed out with a club, says Josephus. Matthias was stoned, beheaded and crucified, Andrew was preaching in Asia, and ended up crucified by order of Algenas, proconsul of Achaia. Mark was sent to Egypt, planted a church in Alexandria, and was dragged do death, says Eusebius. Peter, says a tradition, died in Rome, crucified head downwards. Paul died in Rome, and Jude, some early writers say, was crucified in Jerusalem. Bartholomew was flogged and crucified, Thomas allegedly died a martyr in India, killed by a spear. Luke was probably hanged from an olive tree in

Greece; Simon (the Zealot) preached in Africa, and was later crucified in Britain. John, as an exception, died a natural death in Patmos at the age of 98. Timothy, bishop in Ephesus, was martyred, Barnabas killed by Jews in Syria. From here a long list of martyrs, Ignatius, Simeon, Clement, Zenon, Faustius, Jobita, Justin Martyr, Polycarp and many others, is written throughout history. *David Barrett* of Global Evangelization Movement has documented around 40 million Christians martyrs since Christ died, averaging 160.000 each year, "not counting those just harassed and kicked out of their houses or denied their social status because of their Christian faith." Barrett anticipates this figure to rise to an average of 300.000 martyrs each year in the year 2025.

#### You cannot burn the church

The true church of Jesus Christ cannot be burnt. It is not made of wood, hay, straw and even stone, but of the redeemed people of God. If the most visible aspects of traditional Christendom, church buildings etc., can be attacked, houses usually won't. In almost every culture the home is a safe and quite protected zone, "*it is simply poor upbringing to attack a private home*", says *Dr. Met Castillo*. I am not saying that the church is virtually immune to persecution in homes, but that it is not only the most natural, but also the safest possible place for it.

#### Strategy of flexible response

In many countries, the housechurches have been and still are the spiritual backbone of Christian movements for many years, even under fierce persecution or surveillance like in Russia, China and some countries in the Middle East. Since housechurches fit invisibly into the existing architecture of any nation, housechurches are able to respond flexibly to any pressure or new situation. Since housechurches focus on sharing lives, not on performing religious worship-services, housechurches can easily exist without alerting the neighbors or the secret police through loud music, clapping, dancing, loud prayers and sermons. Some housechurches even rotate, they meet each time somewhere else, the next meeting place only known to the members. This can be a hotel room, in a rented bus for an outing, under a tree, and in the various houses of members. In some countries people start coming even one by one or two by two early in the morning to the housechurches, in order not to alert any suspicions. If anyone should ask too many nosy questions, it is quite amazing to learn just how many birthdays, weddings, anniversaries and reunions of all kinds some families can have nowadays.

#### Avoid to create our very own "persecution"

A young man in a church stood up and told how he boldly went into the marketplace of villagers adhering to a non-Christian religion. There he started to preach loudly. "They were soon harassing me, finally beating me, and then chased me out of the village, but I am proud I took a stand for Jesus," he exclaimed. I asked him: "Who

told you to offend them? What would Jesus have done in that village? Maybe He would not have openly agitated them at all. He did not want to deliver a bomb, but to win their hearts. Jesus might have started with having dinner with a man of peace in the village, and might not have been chased out of it at all.”

In another city an evangelistic crusade drew massive hostility of non-christian activists. Some Christians got challenged and excited and started to fight with the police. The result were law suits, discrimination, some Christians ended up in jail, there were arguments and other problems.

I was once invited to preach in a small village church in Tamil Nadu, South India. The church of about 35 people met in a rented building, just across the main road. If there was one thing to be mentioned about the worship and singing: it was very loud! This church had hired a big loudspeaker, microphones, and the sound could probably be heard for 500 meters. 50 meters away there was a political meeting going on. Every 5 minutes someone from there would come and politely ask the church to please be more quiet. The leaders of the church were eagerly pointing out to me: “See, we cannot have undisturbed worship. We need the financial help of the West to build our own church building,” they concluded. *“There might be a much more simple and cheaper solution for your problem,”* I said. *“Pull the plug! In such a small family type gathering you really do not need a loudspeaker at all!”*

We need to avoid a wrong sense of competition and religious pride, the eagerness to fight at any length for our “human rights” or “minority status”. Whether the word “crusades” for evangelistic rallies is still an appropriate word for today’s world everyone may judge for himself. If there is true persecution arising, it should happen because of the stumbling block of the Cross, not because of our own lack of wisdom.

#### No peace ahead

Jesus did never predict a more peaceful and unharmed future for the church, living around a romantic village church building in front of lush greens and scenic hills. He prophesied increased heat, persecution and even tribulation. “If they persecute you in one city, flee to another” (Mt 10:23), or: “You will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death” (Mt 24:9). The future scenario for the world which Jesus paints in Mt 24 and other places are not at all of a peacefully united world, harmoniously co-existing and trading with each other and sending and receiving nice Christmas cards and embroidered table clothes all life long. Jesus speaks of a terribly war-torn and increasingly bitter planet, deeply distressed, nation rising against nation, ridden by famines and earthquakes, and worst of all, a loss of love and increase of hatred.

#### Be prepared

The political, religious and even economic climate of the world is heating up ideologically and spiritually. Noah did not start building the Ark when it began to rain. For a similar reason we need to be prepared today for what comes tomorrow:

1. We need to develop a persecution proof quality or mentality first, and prepare ourselves to again become worthy to be persecuted by conforming with the patterns of the Kingdom of God, and stand up for the name of God, even if this means we lose face and respectability in society. This preparation starts with a revival of New Testament quality of Christianity in all of us, today, where a fire again starts to burn in us that no one can quench.
2. We need to let an appropriate structure of the church emerge out of this mindset, and again embrace the New Testament form of housechurches, because they will be able to not only sustain the life of the church, but allow it to flourish and grow even under pressure and persecution.

Then we need to consider the consequences of this decision, pray alone and together with our families, friends, churches, organizations and co-workers, listening to God for his direction, and start taking the appropriate measures. Now.

### The Mennonites in Ethiopia

It is a well-known story by now that the Mennonite Church of America did traditional mission work in Ethiopia. In 1982 the Meserete Kristos Church had around 5.000 members. Then the communist government took over. The government confiscated all the church buildings and properties, and threw most of their leaders into jail. The Mennonite church became, almost by government decree, a "lay driven house based" movement. But instead of slowing down the church, the drastic measure of the Communists had the opposite effect. After 10 years the Mennonite movement had grown to 50.000 people. Its most explosive growth period started, when two of their presumed pillars of growth were taken away: their church buildings and their pastors.

"Now we have a good two-step plan for the growth of the church anywhere," exclaimed a Pastor humorously at the end of a seminar. "Close down all the church buildings, and kindly ask all pastors to take a prolonged vacation!" he said.

### When did persecution start?

Although God's elect, His people, prophets and godly Kings have almost always been threatened and persecuted, the days of persecution for the New Testament church did not start by accident. "And Saul was in hearty agreement with putting Stephen to death. And on *that day* a great persecution arose against the church in Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles" (Acts 8:1).

### *What had happened?*

In Acts 7 Stephen had preached his sermon before the religious authorities, and almost all he said was acceptable to them - until he reached one single topic, touched one wound, dared to tackle only hot item which was the King of all Taboos. When

they heard *this*, "they were furious and gnashed their teeth, covered their ears and, yelling at the top of their voices, all rushed at him and stoned him".

What had they heard to lose their mind in such a manner? What terrible and explosive subject did Stephen touch?

He had said: "*The Most High does not live in Temples made by men.*"

Stephen had questioned the core of their belief, the temple, the religious building.

As much as the Tabernacle and the Temple with the worship related to it were at the core of Old Testament religious practice, the New Testament brings in a totally new dimension of worship, where the Spirit of God seems to clearly disassociate himself from bricks. From now on, the people themselves are the temple (1 Cor 3:16; 6:19). What does this do to the old temple? "*One greater than the temple*" has come" (Mt 12:6). It replaces it with the temple of the Body (John 2:19-21). It closes the chapter about stone temples and temple centred worship, and opens a new chapter. Worship does not any more happen in Jerusalem or Samaria, at any special "Houses of the Lord", Tabernacles", holy places, buildings or around holy symbols like stone altars, but "in spirit and truth" (John 4:23-24), because God is spirit and truth. The Temples are gone forever, never to return. Even in heaven, there will be no temple: "*I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are it's temple*" (Rev. 21:22).

When Jesus spoke to the Samaritan woman, she immediately brought up the topic of religious worship, obviously at the core of her heart. "*We worship at this mountain, you Jews say we should worship in Jerusalem. Who is right?*" "*Nobody,*" answers Jesus. "*The time comes and has come, that the true worshippers of God will worship God in truth and Spirit,*" not in any place more holy than the other. The whole concept of a "house of God", a temple as a religious or holy place, an abode of God with men, a holy night, is completely vanished in the New Testament.

In the New Testament, God simply never asked anyone to build a religious house for him. "Heaven is my throne, and earth is the footstool of my feet; what kind of house will you build for me?" says the Lord; or what place is there for my repose?" (Acts 7:49).

He much rather builds ourselves into a spiritual house, the church, make us part of his household, and builds a house for us in heaven, in the city to come.

#### Religion - the core of the problem

"*Religion is for unbelievers; it's the business of the godless*", says Swiss Theologian Karl Barth. Religion is what man makes out of God; Christianity is what God makes out of man. Christianity, therefore, is no religion. It is a life relationship with a living God. The moment Christianity becomes religion, it dies. Religion literally means to bind yourself back, to rest a secure anchor at a safe place, so we are not swept away by the current of life into unknown and dangerous waters. Religion tries to reach up to

God, and throw an anchor into a safe place beyond the line between humans and God, the secular and the saint, then it safe guards that anchor and line at any cost. Religion does not only not see that Christ has done all that for us; *it does not want to see it.*

The religious man cuts a tree in the forest, carves an idol out of it, places it before himself, falls down before it and exclaims: "Save me!" (Jer. 10). He makes his own arrangements with the spiritual world, and should anyone be proud or convincing enough, he will find a new religion, if necessary, the way we deal with God here in this part of the world. Religion wants to be on the safe side in terms of spiritual things. The more insecure someone is deep inside, the more fantastic is the amount of time and energy he will spend to defend his religious convictions and sacred cows, in order not to reveal his deep doubts and lose face. The religious person needs daily assurance of what he is not sure, touch what he knows he cannot touch, smell the unsmellable. He wants to feel God, hear God, drink God, eat God, internalize God, and would love to ultimately possess God and put him - or at least something related to God, something holy - onto a throne, into a safe, close the heavy metal door and put the key under his mattress. Then he will hire a sacred priest or holy man to safeguard the shrine for good money, later build a religious house around the idol, the safe and the priest, and visit it himself once a week, give donations and ask blessings. This way the religious man has created a temple for himself, because he is the genius behind it, and he knows ultimately that he sits on the throne himself. That is what troubles him most. That he has been deceived by the devil who lusts to detract worship away from God any way he can, has not yet crossed his mind.

His skin loves to crawl with excited goosebumps when he participates with feverish fervor in religious ceremonies with candles, holy music, smells and bells, and awe-inspiring rituals, and he will defend his religious traditions and practices to almost any extreme extent and argue about it without any logic, because he ultimately argues about himself.

The root problem is he knows deep down that he is lost without God, but he is too proud to say so, because of peer pressure of friends, family and society. No one has told him yet that there is a way to deal with his pride and sin, the cross of Jesus Christ.

In Islam, for example, there is no concept of assurance of salvation, except, some say, to die in a Holy War. Even after observing all religious laws, there is no guarantee Allah will ever let you go to paradise; he may just feel different that day you die. That makes people deeply insecure. Deeply insecure people are the ideal market for insurance. And deeply insecure people in the area of religion will buy almost anything from the sales representatives of religion, do this, that and the other, in order to have at least the feeling of safety. This pattern cannot calm the empty agony of peacelessness, and search going on inside people.

Religion is ultimately false worship, pseudosacred beliefs and useless practices inspired, empowered and defended by "the spirit of this world". Many Bible teachers have pointed out in regard to religion to the whore of Babylon, "drunk with the blood of the saints, for all nations have drunk the maddening wine of her adulteries, and the

merchants of the world grew rich from her excessive luxuries” (Rev. 17:6; 18:3). Since every person has been born a sinner (Psalm 51; Rom 3:23), everyone has a wounded consciousness, he knows he is guilty against God. The easy answer to calm this trouble is religion, which is like a built-in feature of every person on earth; the world literally steams with religion, even if it comes in the form of agnosticism and liberalism, to which teachings its adherents cling with passionate religious fervor. We do not have to do anything to become religious, it is creational, natural, and it creeps in unaware, like an ugly spirit raising its head while everyone sleeps. Religion builds up like static energy when we walk with plastic shoes on a carpet. It needs the power of the Holy Spirit, constant prophetic and apostolic ministry and the ongoing equipping of the saints to maintain a non-religious, alert and sober spirit, and to be free from religion, and liberated by Christ to worship him in truth and spirit.

If I were the devil and wanted to stop Christians from being effective witnesses to Jesus, I would definitely let loose the most deadly plague on the followers of Jesus there is on this planet; religion. I would look for the weakest members of the church - which sometimes look to be the strongest! - whisper into their minds the age old and history-proven words ”Did God really say?” (Gen. 3:1), undermine their faith in God’s word and God himself, and instill in them the hunger for more security, power, glory and fame - and then feed them a ready made poison: religion. The devil will ultimately rejoice if he can arrange the ultimate demonic scheme: to persecute the church in the name of the church, to persecute the people of God in the name of God, to hold the head of the organic Body of Christ under the water as long as possible by functionaries of organized religion.

In establishing multiplying housechurch movements, we therefore need to be excitingly sober and aware of emerging religious cults around special names, famed rituals and traditions, moral laws, spiritual practices and methods, pseudo-holy worship patterns and religious experiences. We need to literally ”earth” any religious energy which builds up regularly like static electric energy by coming to the Cross of Christ and ask him to set us free individually and corporately from the religious spirit, and fill us with His Spirit again and again, until the Earth is filled with the fragrance of God, where ”believers are a letter read by all men” and ”the manifest wisdom of God is made known through the church” (Eph. 3:10), through simple and supernatural housechurches in which the people of God share their lives with God and each other. Those houses literally will change the earth.

We also need to understand again, that in the days when Stephen spoke against the Temple, not only did Saul and his men lose their mind in bloody fanaticism, but literally all hell broke loose, because the core of the religious and demonic system to keep people in blindness and ignorance and therefore lost for eternity was under direct attack.



### Unprecedented growth - unprecedented persecution

As God's Spirit resurrects and literally re-incarnates the Body of Jesus in its organic and original form again; as Jesus the head of the Church restores apostolic and prophetic patterns to the Church, there will be an unprecedented and explosive growth of housechurches in many nations. Uncountable people will be saved and incorporated into the churches, the poor and the rich, the rural and the urban populations alike. But alongside this final harvest movement we should not forget for a second that what Jesus predicted will come true: persecution will mount like never before, because the devil will realize that now the church means real business, and is now structured and equipped with a harvesting tool that he dreads the most and has spent almost 2.000 years to obliterate from the planet: the simple nonreligious household of God in the form of housechurches. This global movement, emerging from the shadows of history and religious tradition, is empowered and does actively storm against the "gates of hell", preventive mechanisms, spiritual roadblocks and religious mindsets and probably even cherub-type demons like the ones God had placed before the garden of Eden to prevent Adam and Eve to reenter paradise. Those gates or portals (Mt 16:18) can be interpreted as a devilish equivalent to the "beautiful gate" of the temple where the lame man was healed after Peter and John prayed for him (Acts 3). The outer court of the Temple was not the inner sanctuary itself, it was a first stage of the Temple. In the same way, the "gates of hell" might be portals and heavily guarded gateways and entries trying to keep people inside the gigantic waiting room of hell, a place where, if nothing happens, billions of people will die and glide into a godless eternity into hell. As American intercessor *Cindy Jacobs* said, "the church will have to possess the gates of the enemy." As Jesus has clearly predicted, those gates will not prevail and hold their captives forever.

We need to be ready for the moment that happens. In terms of our vision, in terms of our readiness, in terms of our flexible structures, we also need to be ready for any number of people, God himself chooses to add to His church. Just like in the time of Elisha (2. Kings 3 and 4) we need to "make this valley full of trenches", and "ask all our neighbors for empty jars", so God, seeing our faith, can pour out his water and fill those ditches to the brim, and those jars with his oil.

## 7. No progress without change

*The art of Transitioning, or: how to avoid to do the New in the power of the Old*

A camel caravan was trodding along the desert. Suddenly someone was missing. They finally found him, sitting under a tree in the last oasis. When they asked him why he stayed behind, he said: *"My body moved so fast during the journey. I need to wait for my spirit to catch up with me again."* Similarly to this, many Christians experience that their spirit sometimes will go far ahead of their present day realities. Like in a vision or a dream, they suddenly feel lifted away from their wellknown life and soar above the current planes and deserts, driven to unknown lands by the wind of the Spirit. Once they wake up from their vision or dream, they feel challenged to go where they have not gone before. They experience the classical tension between a vision of the future, and the realities of their present situation. This seems to happen to many Christians in regards to the nature of the Church. Many, therefore, feel the need to allow for their body to catch up with their spirit again, and for the structures to match the new quality of church they are discovering. To borrow and turn around the illustration of our lost camel traveler: their spirit has gone far away into the future and is now resting under a tree in an oasis far ahead, while their body still toils under the sun of the desert and wants to catch up.

The leader of a denomination once asked me after a seminar: *"I am 100 percent convinced of housechurches. But the denomination I lead is based on the traditional church model. What do I do now?"*

He had seen a new vision of church, but, as a responsible leader, saw his present day realities and realized that he had some catching-up to do now with his structures.

In almost every meeting, seminar or conference on the subject of a relational, organic, house-based church movement there is an inevitable question. It usually goes like this: *"I have understood what you are saying, and I am totally with you. But I have this church at home. It is running according to the traditional pattern. How do I change the system without breaking it?!"* I usually call this the "How to cross the river without wetting my feet" -question. Can we really have progress without change? I do not think so. But the painful part is: all change is personal. It upsets routines and traditions. But if we want to see new things happening in and through the church, we need to be prepared to make personal changes first, changes in the family second, and changes in our ministry third.

After one seminar in an Asian country, the leader of a denomination came up to me with that very question. *"I am personally involved in pastoring a church. What would you suggest me to do now?"*, he asked.

It was 10 PM in the evening, we were walking on a lush green towards our sleeping quarters. I rather casually said to him: "Good that you ask what you could do. I would stop pastoring in the traditional sense, realize, in your case, that I have a more

apostolic role, lay down my office, get my hands free, and start fathering and equipping a new generation of housechurch planters.”

*“That is the answer I was looking for the last 7 years!”*, he exclaimed.

Not everything new is good, and not all change is helpful. Although it is already a well known story, I still love that letter, because it reflects not a theological conviction, but a philosophy, that simply cannot see necessary and good change, because it wants to defend the *Status Quo*:

January 31, 1829

To President Jackson,

*The canal system of this country is being threatened by the spread of a new form of transportation known as “railroads.” The federal government must preserve the canals for the following reasons:*

*1. If canal boats are supplanted by “railroads,” serious unemployment will result. Captains, cooks, drivers, hostlers, repairmen and lock tenders will be left without means of livelihood, not to mention the numerous farmers now employed in growing hay for the horses.*

*2. Boat builders would suffer, and towline, whip and harness makers would be left destitute.*

*3. Canal boats are absolutely essential to defend the United States. In the event of the expected trouble with England, the Erie Canal would be the only means by which we could ever move the supplies so vital to waging modern war.*

*As you may well know, Mr. President, “railroad” carriages are pulled at the enormous speed of fifteen miles per hour by “engines” which, in addition to endangering life and limb of passengers, roar and snort their way through the countryside, setting fire to crops, scaring the livestock and frightening women and children. The Almighty certainly never intended that people should travel at such breakneck speed.*

*Martin Van Buren, Governor of New York.*

(from: Dynamic preaching, Net Results Magazine, March 1991)

#### Four phases of a paradigm shift

If we want to see practical changes, our paradigm must change first. A paradigm is the way we see and interpret the world according to an inbuilt pattern or a worldview, seeing things through a specific type of glasses. A paradigm shift is a process which typically has four stages:

*a. “Search it!”* A paradigm shift usually starts with a crisis of our old worldview, which may be related to a personal crisis. Crisis gives birth to creativity. Without

asking pertinent and pointed questions, without a burning search for new answers there will be no room to even accept a new insight or even a new paradigm. False contentment is the biggest enemy of change. Typically a paradigm shift starts therefore with a crisis, where our safe and sound world, our traditional way of explaining things, simply falls to pieces. This crisis can be caused by an accident or a revelation, a negative or positive experience with something that simply does not fit into our world. The Chinese word for crisis is *wu-wei*, and means change as well as the opportunity of starting something new.

*b. "Preach it"*. In the second phase, we find what we have searched for. I call it the "eureka-phase", because this part of a paradigm shift is usually accompanied by the overwhelming feeling of thrill and excitement of someone who has "found it". We may find ourselves standing up with hands in the air and bubbling foam on our lips about our new discovery, and want to tell everyone in an almost evangelistic or apologetic fashion about it. The truth is, that we usually find only a piece of the truth, a fragment of a larger piece, but our desperate search has temporarily made us blind to the bigger picture. We have been thirsty for too long, and now we have found a well all we want is to drink, drink, drink. This is the most dangerous phase of a paradigm shift, as our excitement may drive us to immature and naive statements or actions, which are difficult to redeem later.

*c. "Live it"*. In this third phase we symbolically sit down, wipe the emotional foam off our mouths, and start to become an integral part of our new-found paradigm. We stop preaching and defending it, we live it.

*d. "Teach it"*. This last phase turns us into a change agent, helping others to discover the paradigm we have found ourselves, and assisting them in making the necessary changes themselves.

### Three options of change

One of the most devastating frustrations anyone can experience is, if we try *to do the new in the power of the old*. It is like preaching democracy from the loudhailers of a warship of a colonializing nation. Jesus in his teaching about new wine in old wineskins and the new patch on old cloth is not lacking clarity at all. He said, that two so radically different systems like old wine and new wine cannot be mixed without doing damage to both the wine and the wineskins. The same principle is true for the new patch on old cloth (Mt 9:16-17). That gives us three options for change:

*a. Do not change at all*, and keep going. Stay within your structure, maintain it, expand it, work from within it, because you realized that change will be too costly, too upsetting, too painful, or simply too frightening and insecure. God will bless you. Not everyone has an apostolic or prophetic ministry, unafraid of touching and changing "touchy" subjects and people. Do the best you can to use your structure for good, and have close and personal relationships - open doors and bridges of communication - to those who have taken another choice. You may need each other in the days ahead. Maybe God will open doors for cooperations with some people in the

future, who help you, your church, organization or denomination, to be ready to change. Prepare yourself for that day already now.

*b. Attempt a compromise* to "dance at two weddings at the same time", pour new wine into old wineskins, or old wine into new wineskins, and try to live in both worlds. This is, from all I have seen, a sure recipe for disaster. You may very well enter a phase of transitioning - and never leave it.

*c. Prepare yourself for change.* Your spirit may have gone far ahead, now the structures have to catch up with it.

### Beyond the Titanic model

The best and most radical kind of change might be to start all over again. One pastor got up in a seminar and said: "*That means we have to close down all our churches!*" And he was quite serious. But with a church of more than 10.000 attenders, that is not easy to do at all. To change from one setup to another means transitioning, crossing over from one camp to another. There are many ways to do it, all of them are dangerous, costly, they take time, and they still sometimes do not work. Companies and businesses spend millions to anticipate and implement change in order to remain in business or gain markets. Management and change consultants like *Tom Peters* are earning 50.000 Dollars a day for a seminar for business executives. However, there are some changes that do not change a thing. They help us to soothe our mind and our emotions, give us the temporary illusion that we are doing something, but they are as harmless as "a storm in a waterglass". Someone might want to paint his sanctuary afresh; move the piano from the left side to the right side, or merge with another, similar, organization. I call this type of change the "*Titanic model*." When the Titanic was struck by an iceberg, no amount of changing the furniture, repainting the ship, or even restructuring the apartments would do any good. They would have had only cosmetic value and be obsolete, as the ship itself was sinking into oblivion.

### You are the man!

Let me point out that most changes in history did come from quite unbalanced persons, radical in most senses. Very few innovations or true and radical changes were initiated by committees and boards; most came from visionary people who saw what no one saw, said, what no one dared to say, and did what was "forbidden" and taboo at their time. Many of yesterdays revolutionaries, like Luther, Booth, Wesley, or Hudson Taylor, have become today's trusted pillars of the church. Many of them have created churches or movements, which today have become so big, vast and administratively complex, that the statistical probability for these organizations or churches to entrust enough decision-making power into the hands of just one visionary person is minute. Yet, change starts with people, and you might just be the man or the woman for the job. I encourage you to start to do this in the area of your personal or organizational jurisdiction, no matter how small or large it is. Start with what is at hand.

George Bernard Shaw once said: *"The reasonable man adapts himself to the world; the unreasonable one persists in trying to adapt the world to himself. Therefore, all progress depends on the unreasonable man."* In this sense, how unreasonable do we dare to be?

#### Five models of Transitioning

Except the radical approach to change - to start all over again - there are five different ways of transitioning which I see:

##### 1. "Windows 95"

The well known Computer programme "Windows 95" allows you to make changes in its configuration, which determines the way the computer understands itself and ultimately runs your programmes. Changing the configuration is like changing an entry in your own passport. If you want the new changes in the configuration to work properly, the software will flash you a message: "You have to restart the computer in order for the changes to become effective". Once you restart your computer, the new configuration will work, and your computer will run differently. In changing and transitioning from one model of church to another, this means that you might want to close down your existing work, and restart it according to a new "configuration", a different set of values. This approach would allow you to close down a phase properly and in style, lay a new foundation, a new "Q" (quality), and then build a different structure into a different direction.

##### 2. The "Beachhead Principle" of the prophetic 20 percent

Another approach is this: carefully and prayerfully choose and find those 20 percent of people in your church, organization or denomination, who you feel will be well able, suited and gifted to lead your church or organization into a new future. They will build a "prophetic beachhead" into the future, a base, which you later expand for more people to follow. Form one or several housechurches with them, live and model the pattern for them and with them, without touching your existing structure or changing a thing in it. For a while, which can be up to 6, 12 or 18 months, you will run a parallel structure, the old and the new model together. Once you have established a new pattern of behavior and see that those 20 Percent you have chosen are well into the new paradigm and finding their way forward, empower them to multiply the pattern by leading others into the new paradigm themselves. They will then take people "boatload by boatload" to the new beachhead, introduce them into the new church pattern, until no-one else is willing to make the crossing. Then you declare a new phase open, give your marching orders into the new direction, and stop glancing over your shoulders to the other shore, where there will always be some of those standing, who were

simply not ready to do the crossing. You will have to leave them behind, because you know that you need to move on.

In any change process there are four different groups: a small group of "pioneers", who live on the masthead anyway and see what others do not even want to see; a slightly larger group of "early adapters", who accept a new vision early if it is new *and endorsed* by some credible witness; the third group is a large group of "late adapters". They will accept new things only if they are new, come endorsed *and made the new law*. Fourthly, there is a last and again relatively large group of "laggards", hard-core traditionalists, who always seem to remember "the meatpots and onions of Egypt" and will not change no matter what. To wait for them to accept change is futile. They won't. They are under "future shock", as Alvin Toffler says, the paralysis of fear that grips those who feel generally overtaken by developments.

In almost every church or organization you will find those for whom traditional values of the past are more important than to be pro-active, prophetic, and ready to change. In many Asian and African nations there is a strong ancestor cult; similarly, even christian traditionalists may slip into a spiritual ancestor-cult. It is a cult, because the adherents revere those who handed down to them cherished practices, faith systems and beliefs more than Jesus himself, the one who makes everything new. You may want to mentally prepare yourself and your church to ultimately lose them. They will not be lost to the Kingdom of God at all, but will either find another group or church to cope, or start their own.

### **3. Life transitioning**

This process is determined to make the shift from one pattern to the other without losing anyone, as smoothly and pastorally sensitive as possible. This approach introduces a new pattern in incremental steps. It still is a tricky business, because it is like changing a horse into a rabbit at full gallop. The most vulnerable points are the times where the old pattern is not longer fully valid, and the new not yet fully evident. Additionally, it means endless discussions and attempts at convincing traditionalists, and is advisable only for those with supernatural good humor, pastoral patience and prophetic wisdom. You can follow a set of stages: introducing and teaching a new set of values; gradually introducing new patterns of behavior; changing leadership according to the new pattern; resettle on a new foundation and start building.

A small church/organization of up to 100 people or "voting entities" may take 1-3 years for this process. A medium church or organization (100-500) may take between 3-5 years. A large church or organization, above 500, may take between 5 and 8 years or more.

#### 4. Behind their back

This model is for the more desperate and adventurous. It happens in secret, like many inventions, which have occurred under strict security for fear of being stolen or cloned prematurely. In this approach, you start from scratch without organizationally involving your church or organization at all in a new venture. You do it across town, in another place, behind the back of your group, so to speak. It allows a new experiment without getting the spiritual genes and structures mixed, and to observe first hand a new pattern. You might want to delegate some work in your traditional setup to other people to free up more of your own time. As the model grows, you may, at some stage or other, introduce the two entities to each other. One example for this is "The Crowded House" in Sheffield, UK, intentionally not well known.

#### 5. Hong Kong style: multi-structured churches or organizations

As the gospel is dynamic and excellent, reflecting a God who is not mediocre and "average" in any aspect, we need to avoid institutionalized mediocrity as a "balanced mix" between bad and good. A last resort could be therefore to attempt to work according to two *separate* value patterns at the same time, carefully kept apart from each other in order not to mix the unmixable. Many congregational churches have introduced multiple and different worship experiences, quite different from each other, but all organized by the same church. Some, like Holy Trinity Brompton, an Anglican church in London, offer a traditional worship service, and a more family type service a bit later, for different target audiences. Others, like Tilehurst Free Church in Reading (UK), offer cell groups for those who want it, and a congregational church service for those who prefer the traditional pattern. I call this the Hong Kong approach, because this is similarly to the "one country - two systems" pattern, where China and Hongkong function under one government, but with two administrative systems. One is based on socialist, the other on capitalist values. It may be a temporary compromise. But in some stages a compromise is better than a split.

#### Management and Organizational aspects of Transitioning

In business in a fast moving world with ever changing markets and products and an exploding technology, change is the only constant. Management advisers and business consultants know, that if a company is unable to adjust to change and beat the competition, they are out of business and have to close down. I do resist all too naive attempts to compare churches with companies, because they are like apples and oranges. Business success and maximum profit strategies are a bit different from following the Lamb of God and carrying our cross; the church and business are built on very different foundations, and pursue different agendas, Mammon and God. But there are areas of overlap, specially in the area of organizing the visible part of the church. We can therefore risk at least a quick glance over the fence, to see how "the children of the world", as Jesus says, handle this. The language in business in regards



to transitioning and change is in no uncertain terms: *"Whatever made you successful in the past, won't in the future. It is the end of the world as we know it,"* says Tom Peters in his book *The Circle of Innovation*. That is why we need to *"think revolution, not evolution. Incrementalism is innovation's worst enemy,"* he contends.

Frantic over-activity, in churches as well as in business, can often be a cover-up for deep-seated insecurity. *Jim Utterback*, in his book *"Mastering the Dynamics of Innovation"*, says about those unwilling to change because of new technological developments: *"They resist all efforts to understand innovation, and further entrench their positions in the older products. This results in a surge of productivity and performance that may take the old technology to unheard-of heights. But in most cases, this is a sign of impending death."* More important than attending the next seminar with "new insights" might be, says Peters, to buy an eraser to wipe away wrong thoughts and teachings, which block new developments. We need to even develop a "strategic forgetfulness", he argues. *"The problem is never how to get new, innovative thoughts into your mind, but how to get old ones out,"* says *Dee Hock*, creator of VISA. Many companies, according to Peters, do not really need a CEO, a Chief Executive Officer, but a CDO, a Chief Destructive Officer, whose job is to regularly tear down useless structures and procedures, avoiding personality cults, regularly slaughtering the holy cows that have crept in to graze amongst them, and avoid naive plans because the Boss of the company has fallen in love with a product that no-one else really wants.

### Bless the mess

In search of excellence and new products and breakthroughs, *"the size of your vision corresponds with the size of your paper basket"*. Business visionaries are immensely productive, but most of the time they produce useless rubbish, until that golden moment they come up with that one gem of insight or invention which will change the course of history. That is why we need to *"bless the mess"*, to encourage innovators, product developers and visionary and seemingly chaotic seekers of the impossible, the "nerds", bespectacled and almost unsociable brain geniuses working away forever in those little shacks and laboratories like Microsoft's *Bill Gates*, who ended up leading one of the worlds most influential companies. When *Tom Peters* is invited to a management consultation of a company in deep trouble, he says, *"in just a second, I have the answer. Of the 150 executives, 144 are between the ages of 48 and 59. I call them OWM - Old White Males. They talk alike, smell alike, dress alike, eat the same food and think the same thoughts."* No wonder, he concludes, that there is no creativity in an atmosphere of conformity - and no space for vision, because everyone tightly observes and controls the other.

## 8. All Change is Practical

*The last step you want to take determines your next step*

*"That means that we have to change almost everything we do!"*, exclaimed a well known mission leader in India after hearing about housechurches.

However, I suggest not everything will change when we start to develop housechurch movements. The eternal gospel, its content, live spiritually and many quality insights which the church of the past has discovered and taught us will remain, and needs to remain.

But if we seriously consider housechurches, it will have some very serious theological and practical consequences for the church, for church growth, for church planting and also for missions.

*"The truth will never harm a just cause"*, said Mahatma Gandhi.

This material, however, is not intended to criticize any particular Church at all. We have to move beyond that. In genuine love and appreciating for each other we are all called to be part of the solution, and not to remain part of the problem.

Many Christian leaders today agree that sober thinking and even mission statistics will tell anyone that even if we multiply what we do today by a factor of 10, it is not going to make a big difference at all in terms of discipling the nations. Sometimes I am startled to observe issues and areas of ministry where seemingly no amount of empirical research and truth can change our thinking for good. *"How foolish to act before knowing the facts!"*, says a not-so-famous proverb. In many countries, the population may still grow faster than the church; evangelism can be a flash-in-the-pan; churches may be aging; the structures need to be changed; the majority population does not respond to the type of church we favor; and even large evangelistic projects and programmes may barely scratch the surface, if we compare their results with the huge population figures of today.

**Any sacred cows standing in the way of the Lamb?**

It may neither be the first nor the last time, that the people of God were deaf to God's true intentions while dancing around a golden cow. Most leaders agree today that the obstacles in regard to the extension of the Kingdom of God are much more inside our own thinking than out there. The key problems of churches and missions today, many contend, are neither money, nor the -isms of the day, but "in the hard ground of our own head," hidden in those unquestioned concepts, axioms, and long-grown convictions and man-made traditions which have become so dear and sacred to us that even someone daring to touch them is for many "an act of heresy".

This is what I call the "holy cow syndrome", where seemingly sacred animals (spiritual concepts) block the road for the Lamb of God, dare to sleep in the streets

and make the public drive around them or accept a traffic jam while one of these dear animals feels it needs to stand in the middle of a main road and look unimpressed. Rather than "accepting the cow" in a passive mode, we sometimes need to sound the horn, and, who knows, the cow might move, the road clears, and life goes on.

### Pay the price

In housechurch Christianity, one of the prices to pay is to cease the worship of individual freedom over the collective obedience to Christ. If we want what Christ wants, we no longer will be willing to do what everyone just likes to do, and how and when he likes it, irrespective of the community he lives with. No longer can we call our homes just "our own" homes, or treat our cars just as "ours" only. In the West, the lifestyle of many Christians is still centred around a job carrier, TV, hobbies, privacy and pets, sugarcoated with a thin layer of Christian behavior like attending a church service, praying before meals and listening to *Christian* music. This is not too much different from the lifestyle of the average person living in the West, where in one single lifelong orgy of individualism almost everything is geared and structured for the pursuit of personal security, success and fun, and even individual spiritual growth.

In the non-western world, we need to overcome an addiction to wrong priorities, where family honor, clan and tribal allegiance often still comes firmly before an allegiance to God; and where strong shame-oriented cultures make it difficult to say the plain truth and confess sins to one other, and where conversations and sometimes the whole life often remains on a religious and polite surface. In other words, without our own transformation, which starts with repentance, the crucifixion of self and yes, of some of our cultural values and habits, the giving-up of a self-centred lifestyle, where we simply stop to conform neatly and painfree to the patterns of this world, there will be little redemptive power left to touch and transform our societies with the Gospel. *Christianity has never really been cheap, it always was meant to cost our very lives.* For almost 2000 years people have tried again and again to come up with a lucky compromise, a "win-win"-situation between the claims of God's Kingdom and the Spirit of this world. One of the results of this was that some of the sad consequences of aligning ourselves with the world in order to be fashionable and modern have become an institutionalized part of the way we "think and do church", and so some of it has become part of our heritage and cherished tradition, which may now be painful and difficult to rethink. However, Paul's message on the subject is short and simple: After I became disciple of Christ, I as my old self do not exist any more, but Christ lives in me.

As any pastor of a traditional church knows, it is not only fairly easy but also quite common for Christians in a Sunday-morning-service-cum-Wednesday-night-Bible-study Christianity to live double standards, to have a secret second life hidden away for years from their own congregation or pastor, or harbor petty sins for decades without anyone knowing. This is also due to the fact that out of 168 hours of a week, Christians in traditional meeting oriented Christianity spend typically 3-4 hours together with other Christians per week. This is simply not enough time to effectively

transfer life and Kingdom values, to develop deep relationships, make disciples and lay down our lives for each other.

Housechurch Christianity will greatly reduce a compromising lifestyle trying to make the best out of both worlds, because it involves us deeply into everyday-community and healthy ongoing accountability. This will cost us dearly. But if our lifestyle is in any relationship to the salvation of real people from a real hell, I reckon it is worth it.

In this small volume I would like to make a shortlist of a few practical consequences of a housechurch setup, and some key issues we might need to consider and address as we start developing a housechurch movement and now want to look for the next steps:

***We would stop do church, and start be church***

We would stop going to church, and start becoming the church, 7 days a week. Church would cease to be an organized Sunday morning activity, and start to be the corporate organic local lifestyle of Christians.

***Church would again touch all of life, and be "holistic"***

Because church again becomes part of everyday life, all of life starts to become touched and transformed by God. The Gospel of the Kingdom would be expressed again in "words, works and wonders", reflecting the triune and holistic God the Son, God the Father, and God the Holy Spirit.

***The end of the money problem***

Many traditional churchplanting activities and mission movements have a significant minimizing factor - money. We needed money for outreach activities, buying a plot, renting or building a special building, and paying the pastors salary, as well as putting up a decent parsonage. Then, we needed money for chairs, a PA system, and an overhead projector. Not so with housechurches. Housechurches would not cost money, they would produce money, which could financially support the five-fold ministries which in turn support them spiritually. Housechurches simply do not need a fulltime professional pastor, any person with the qualification of an Elder will do.

***The end of the leader-problem***

After money, the second most well-worn outcry of the Christian church is: "We do not have enough leaders!" For a typical congregational church movement, we need a big number of small geniuses. People who can handle any part of the various programmes, from preaching to teaching, marrying and burying, playing the organ, raising funds, organizing and conducting small and big meetings, and conducting bible studies at any time of the day. By changing to a housechurch setup, the world would be full of potential leaders for housechurches in an instant, because we would

not any more require professional or half-professional leaders which fit the congregational structure, but we would have a structure tailor-made for all the people. This would also solve the global spiritual unemployment. Currently we have about 70 percent of all Christians spiritually unemployed, without a way to get involved in their church systems, while the leaders of this very system still cry out for more leaders. In a housechurch situation, everyone would participate and have a spiritual task.

#### ***The end of the place-problem***

Instead of having a problem with more and new buildings to buy, build, rent or lease, we would be able to use what is already there in abundance: homes of every kind and shape. We could simply use the existing houses and their facilities to multiply themselves.

#### ***New quality of conversions***

Most traditional churches organize outreach and evangelistic programmes, in order to make more people attend the churches. Statistically, usually 1 out of 100 who "makes a decision for Christ" in evangelistic meetings (rallies, conventions, "crusades") will actually start attending a church. That means Christians lose 99 out of 100 new "converts", which is not only a costly affair in terms of money and people, but also speaks of a very low quality level of the conversions produced through such activities. Instead of making individual spiritual seekers just pray "repeat after me to invite Jesus into your heart"- style prayers, housechurches would allow much more "relational conversions", often of whole families and households, who would help each other to "stay converted" afterwards. For a quality conversion, contends *David Pawson* in his book "The normal Christian birth", we need personal repentance, personal faith, personal infilling of the Holy Spirit, and baptism. Very different from the rushy atmosphere of evangelistic rallies and follow-up meetings, the housechurch would be able to provide the natural framework for that, and thus improve the quality of the conversion, reduce problems in the churches generated through half-baked conversions, and thus improve the overall quality of the church in a locality.

#### ***"Door to door"?***

"Do not go from door to door!", said Jesus (Lk.10). Yet, many evangelistic activities have "door to door" as it's methodical and strategic foundation stone. This has very serious consequences. In Lk 10, Jesus sends his disciples "two by two", without money, and asks them to find a "man of peace" in a village. They should enter his house, forming an immediate nucleus church with that "third member". Then they are to "eat, what they give you, drink, what they give you". Eating and drinking is a very significant means of identification with a new group. If we appreciate what they eat, they might appreciate what we have to say. Many Christians today take their lunch packets with them for so-called village outreach, not trusting the villagers to provide them with clean and healthy food. But how can villagers trust those visitors with their

eternal life in return? In many societies hospitality is a God-given task; if strangers comes to a village and knock at a door, it is the task of that family to host the strangers. If, however, those strangers are seen leaving the first house and knocking on other doors, the villagers have only 2 conclusions: Either there is something terribly wrong with the first house, that they could not host them, or those strangers are in fact not guests at all, but either sales people, criminals or members of a cult. In both instants, the sales people might win a few people for some time, but ultimately lose the village. Such "evangelistic door-knocking" works usually *extract-oriented*, knocks at a great number of doors to end up with a small handful of people, who then have "to be followed-up." Apostolic-prophetic churchplanting usually works the other way round, is *penetration-oriented*, and moves from the few to the large. It is more important to find (this is one of the places where the prophet comes in) and stay in the *right* house then to knock the door of *many* houses; then establish a quality housechurch there, and proceed to make this house of peace the foothold and beachhead for discipling the whole village or city.

***Missions will be redefined.***

At the heart of much of our traditional and contemporary missions is the congregational understanding of church. From this static centre we "reach out" to others in proximity of "the church", try to get them also to "come to church", and call it Evangelism. If we do this abroad or across significant social and ethno-linguistic barriers, we call it missions. If the housechurch, however, would become the centre of our missions understanding, the static church could stop just identifying and sending mobile specialists, the "missionaries", but would rather start to send itself by simply acting apostolically as a whole. The church, in the best sense of the word, would again become the mission, the sender as well as the sent one. We would "send forth" the very multipliable units of the church, who can change with their spiritual DNA everything it touches, and can deposit it's spiritual message into every culture and language. It would work very much like a virus infection, where the virus would introduce it's own genetical code into every host cell it touches, and therefore transforming it into its own image. Missions would again regain the dynamics of yeast. The yeast does not send informed emissaries of yeast - it sends itself. Instead of bringing more people to the church, we would be bringing the church to the people.

***More action, less acting***

The congregational type church is very much geared towards stage-centred performance. The emphasis is on "conducting" the meeting, "delivering" the message, "performing" the functions, "celebrating" the rites. The bottom line is, with so many spectators involved, it is not a discipleship structure at all, but lends itself at least potentially for acting, that is, going through the motions without emotions, performing the outward forms without content, and the spectators remaining empty and void behind a pious smokescreen of court nods, hallelujahs and amens. The question "are you acting powerful, or are you a powerful actor?" would be answered

by having the church return back into normal life, away from artificially conducted meetings. Result: Authenticity and authority is restored locally right in the neighborhoods. This will lead to less acting, and more significant action.

***Combining local and regional dynamics, spiritual LAN and WAN***

When computers are linked together by cables or telephone wires, we differentiate between a Local Area Network - LAN, and a Wider Area Network - WAN. The LAN could be part of a WAN. This will be exactly the way housechurches will develop. A local network of interdependent - not independent! - housechurches (LAN) would interlink with a wider network of housechurches (WAN) in the district, the city, the state, exchange ministries and work together in a strategic partnership towards a goal of saturation church planting.

***A whole new era in reaching Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists***

It is no secret that, given the current structure and setup of the church, only marginalized and "lower caste" - adherents of others faiths are "joining the church" in any significant numbers, with painfully few exceptions. More and more Christians realize that the very setup of church is the biggest part of the problem. For many Muslims, Hindus and Buddhists entering a church building itself is a spiritual, cultural, social and philosophical problem. As relational family-style housechurches develop themselves, very much according to the extended-family mentality in those three religions mentioned, this will open up a whole new perspective on helping people raised in Muslim, Hindu and Buddhist societies to follow Jesus Christ in an appropriate fashion. Already today we see that, of all possible church structures, housechurches have by far the greatest potential to grow amongst Muslim, Hindu and Buddhist people groups. Many Christians have tried, for example, to bring Muslims to the churches; housechurches would allow to bring the church to the Muslims.

***Thriving in socialist and communist cultures***

The traditional church has not done particularly well to attract the attention and excitement of intellectual students, atheists, socialists and communists. But what are their slogans usually all about? About redistribution of wealth, sharing resources and justice for all. These are all New Testament values, which the congregational church has preached, but not always lived. Communism as an ideology is still a powerful attraction today because it focuses on injustice, the right of the poor, and the redistribution of wealth, if necessary by force. The Communism of Lenin has spoken of "power to the people", but the result was that the power was usurped by the elitist few who "humbled themselves" towards the top of the power-pyramid. As Christians we need to avoid a romantic version of "early communism" and all its dreamy songs and emotions, because Christianity also speaks of power to the people, but it provides a god-given delivery and accountability system for that power called "the Church", where God's power is facilitated through the humble services of crucified elders and

members of the fivefold ministries. The problem with Communism is that it does not deal with the root problem of corruption, the sinfulness of people, so those people who "redistribute wealth" are as fallen and sinful as those from whom they take; more corruption and dictatorship is usually the result. Housechurches with their emphasis on sharing material and spiritual resources and the absence of dictator-type leaders are particularly effective in current or historic socialist or communist societies like Russia, Cuba, China, Vietnam or Ethiopia. Communism is, in many ways, an involuntary strategic ally preparing the mindset of the people for a massive housechurch movement. If any socialist or communist government keeps on failing to implement the "communist paradise," the housechurch, without much propaganda, can deliver the goods; it can do locally what the government cannot do nationally. The housechurch has the answer for the questions socialists ask, and it provides the right structure for life in a working model, because it has found the solution to sin, the root problem.

#### ***The excitement level builds up***

Far fewer people in traditional congregational type churches are mobilized for actual ministry than in small housechurches. Even in a traditional church under 100 attenders, says the research of *Christian Schwarz*, only 31% are involved in a ministry corresponding to their spiritual gifts. In a larger church, the percentage is only 17%. It is a known fact that involved people are excited people, and uninvolved people quickly become bored. The housechurch with its participatory lifestyle is able to immediately involve almost everyone. As a result, more people get excited. Excited people excel, and excellent people attract.

#### **Some practical issues to address**

If we want to see new developments, we might need to do new things. In developing housechurches we will need to address some practical areas. I have listed a few:

#### ***Restore the Families back to the centre of the church***

Western Christendom and secularism has focused strongly on the individual, at the expense of the family. Stable and secure traditional families, and yes, even with the woman managing the home and the children are a much more stable social unit than today's double-earning initially childless couples who may laugh at the Christians and scorn their traditions, but go on to shipwreck their own marriages and bodies for the sake of a short life in luxury. Once they do have children, they often produce insecure, troubled and violent kids. These almost parent-less children grow up peaceless and restless, left to themselves, while their parents pursue a career success or social significance. The family has been sacrificed on the altar of economic and social success, and only the church can break that cycle, because it has found a better and more humane way to live, not for Mammon, but for God. The right relationship



between man and woman as the core of the family is at the core of the housechurch. My friend *Kari Törmä* from "Whole Marriage Ministries" in Finland believes "*we need to focus on the most demanding relationship in the world, the one between husband and wife, to create a healthy foundation for the church and society. Who can take care of his marriage and take care of his family, can also take care of the church.*" One of the best things a father, for example, can do for his children, is to love their mother. Within a family-type housechurch setting, true fathers and mothers can emerge, and healthy families can be restored. Children can contribute in their own ways to the housechurches by just being what they are, bringing out the vulnerable and soft aspects of adults, take the rough edge off them, make them laugh and cry, humble and amaze them. The planting of housechurches, therefore, may very well start in the bedroom and the kids room, with the restoration of the family.

#### ***Develop empowering structures***

Jesus gave them power and the keys - and the early disciples turned the ancient world upside down (Acts 17:6). As Christians, we do not draw power from each other, but from God. Our job on earth, however, is to help bring out literally the best in each other. The core of the great commission is discipling, and discipling is basically empowering others as God has empowered us.

I came across a young and dynamic pastor, who has served many years under a "mighty servant of the Lord", faithfully led the worship, did what he was asked to do, and humbly served the senior servant. However, he was never given real responsibility. After 6 years he was finished, ready to leave, an empty shell, rendered powerless. He changed his workplace, and ended up in another church-network, where the senior pastor immediately saw the potential of this young man, how he could fit into his own vision and strategy. The young man fell from the frying pan into the fire. He was not disciplined and not empowered, he was used.

If we do not disciple and empower others, as Jesus has done, we end up exploiting others, using them for our ends, even if we clothe this in very spiritual terms.

If traditional congregational-type churches do not have discipling at their core, they will not be able to develop a structure that disciplines and empowers people, let alone disciple nations. Quality defines the structure which in turn determines quantity. As a result, people will remain systematically undisciplined and left powerless. If the traditional structure does not empower and disciple, what does it do?

HOW TO EMPOWER OTHERS

HOW TO EXPLOIT OTHERS

let them function  
 believe in them  
 delegate authority  
 partner with Gods plan for them  
 invest in them  
 love them and say so  
 give them what you have  
 discuss with them  
 spend freely time with them  
 give them the keys now  
 serve them  
 praise them  
 transfer masterhood to them

give them functions  
 make them believe in you  
 require submission  
 make them part of your plans  
 use them  
 love the task more than people  
 take what they have  
 preach at them  
 require appointments  
 hold back until you retire  
 let them serve you  
 accept their praise graciously  
 demonstrate masterhood to them

We need to recapture discipling as the heartbeat of the Great Commission, and live this out in our ministries and churches. Housechurches and the Five-Fold ministry are a God-ordained way to disciple and empower each other - and ultimately the nations. We need to do this not only by accident, but by principle, and determine to develop structures and even strategies that support discipling and empowering of others on local, regional, national and even international levels.

***Develop disabled and senior elders***

One way to empower others is to strategically turn to those who are considered weak in our success-driven and youth-oriented societies. 10 percent of the world suffers from injuries and disablement. Instead of trying to make the existing churches more accessible and open for the disabled - to get the disabled to church! - we should also turn the other way round and get the church into the homes of the disabled. We need to encourage and equip disabled persons, who are often enough homebound, to develop their home into a housechurch. Not only will this add 10 percent of the world's population to the list of possible housechurch planters and elders, but you might hardly find more enthusiastic promoters of the idea. Similarly we need to empower not only BYM - Bright Young Men between 18 and 30, who already enjoy the attention of society, but our seniors. Because a traditional church is often very programme driven, there is little need for seniors. However, as we train and equip senior persons to become elders of housechurches, many of them will flourish, just like the churches in their homes will flourish. And we could truly need a good portion of redeemed wisdom and gray hairs in the affairs of the local church. They will become grandfathers with a vision!

***Stop contextualizing, start incarnating***

Jesus was Asian, not European. Most Christians and Not-Yet-Christians agree that we do not really need a contextualized but still basically western church in Asia or Africa or Latin America. Each nation needs to develop its own models of church, incarnating Christ again into its own time, culture and soil. Contextualizing has been a helpful missionary method of the past, where the gospel and usually western expressions of church were adapted and made to fit into the local context of culture and language. Now that the church is literally present and growing in almost all cultures of the world, we need to allow the church to form its own expressions, its rural and its urban forms, speaking powerfully to its own cultural patterns.

***Change our traditional worship patterns***

Missions exists because worship does not. As the pouring out of the Spirit replaces the temple-centred worship rituals and patterns in the Old Testament, Christians are now called to worship God "in spirit and truth". What we are in the danger to overlook is that true New Testament worship has to do much more with Spirit-filled obedience (Rom 12:1-2) than with music and only the singing of "worship" songs. Our worship must centre around the unquestioning readiness to lay aside life, limb, possessions, family, house, friendships, evangelical respectability, everything, to see the knowledge of the glory of the Lord covering the earth as the waters cover the sea. It may be quite appropriate to even recover some New Testament forms of worship, to lay ourselves down flat on the floor in expressing speechless adoration or praising God, (Mt 28:9; Rev 4:10) signaling to God that we are even ready to lay down our very lives for him in obedience to his calling; all this, while not forgetting to sing our songs. However, phrases like "let us now have a time of worship" or "let us now go into worship" meaning that all have to stand to sing some songs, might be less helpful than they sound, because they are a simple misnomer. *"It is important to note that the New Testament never mentions worship as the very the reason for Christians to come together - they come for mutual encouragement and edifying each other (1 Cor 14:26; Hebr. 10:24-25), but focuses more on the how, and not on the when and where of worship"*, says Peter Ignatius of Christian Fellowship in Madras. The New Testament never refers to a meeting of the church as a worship service. *Worship, in short, is not so much what we do but how we do it; not so much what we say or sing, but how we are a living sacrifice.*

***Introduce a new commitment level***

Secret societies have flourished and are still flourishing, because of peoples' curiosity in the unknown, the secret. They want to belong to something special. Christianity in its housechurch form has been a secret society. It still is, and probably will be or become again a secret or semi-secret society. This calls for more attention to the initiation process of novices into the church, and means that we have to require a higher level of commitment for anyone to become part of a local church. After all, it is a commitment to become part of a spiritual family and share one's life with others,

which is a very high commitment, much more than just a commitment to a membership of a voluntary club which is satisfied by attending once in a while. Interesting enough, rather than people flocking to places where they are unconditionally welcome, the number of people who are interested in joining a group is related to the commitment level required.

One Pastor in Germany has made the statement "that the sermons in my church are intellectually so demanding, that not really everybody will truly be able to grasp what is being preached." This caused a lot of people to come just out of curiosity to see whether that preacher was right. The narrower the door, the more people seem to be interested to squeeze through. In addition to this, as the commitment level raises right from the start of someone becoming part of a housechurch, the quality level goes up, also.

### ***Recover tribal patterns of church***

After being driven out of the Garden of Eden, the "home" which God has made for Adam and Eve, mankind has basically become homeless. The place where humans and their creator-God were supposed to meet was closed to them. This left a deep "home shaped vacuum" in the heart and mind of all humans, and explains for the craving we all have to have a home, a castle, family and clan, a refuge where we are safe and secure, where we have an identity - and can possibly forget for a moment that God has driven us all out from his presence. "*Man is a tribal animal*", writes *Peter Marsh* in his book "Tribes". "The early population of the Earth were basically hunters and gatherers, who formed hunting bands as an effective solution to survival. A group of 6-8 hunting males made up a typical band size of 20-25, including women and children. This size proved to be enough for hunting purposes, but not for social purposes like marriage. For that a larger unit of society was required. The ideal population of such village-units seem to have settled at about 500 men, women and children, and so emerged the tribe, typically embracing 20 hunting bands, each consisting of about 6 families", says Marsh. *Social identity is knowing who we are in relation to other people*. Many scientists see the origins of basic human behavior patterns in the area of territoriality, marriage, kinship, taboos, social interaction etc. rooted in the tribal format, which, they say, is still deeply buried in all of mankind. That is why they cannot and should not be suppressed; they are too basic. These tribal patterns emerge automatically, whether we look at traditional or the modern tribes of society, at fox-hunters or football hooligans, commandos or criminals, trade-unionists or terrorists, Boy Scouts or Hell's Angels. All obey basically the same rules. There are modern tribal tendencies everywhere: in our committees, juries, teams and squads; councils, governments, board-members, clubs, our secret societies, protest groups, clans or institutes, our childhood gangs, school-class reunions and our pop-group fan clubs.

### *Chiefdoms and "headless" tribes*

Anthropologists define a "tribe" as a collection of groups of people who share patterns of speech, basic cultural characteristics and, traditionally, a common territory. They appear in two distinctly different forms: acephalous (= headless) tribes who lack a single head and a centralized authority, where the adult members are all part of the decision-making process and all have roughly equal status. Chiefdoms, by contrast, have a clearly centralized authority in the form of a chief, and develop a pyramid structure of authority.

### *Initiation rites*

Initiation, the specially marked transitions from one stage of life to another, or the process of becoming part of a tribe, usually has four stages. First, there is the uninvolved outsider, who is not part of the tribe. He is suspicious of the tribe, and the tribe has been taught to be suspicious against outsiders. Then comes the novice stage, where a person enters into a probation and training period, usually accompanied by symbolic death rituals like circumcision, isolation or other forms of symbolic killing of the initiate, where he becomes dead to the normal life of the tribe. Through suffering and daring deeds the novice declares his commitment and shows courage. The third phase is the welcoming of the former novice as a full member of the tribe. The fourth and last stage is when a full member of the tribe becomes an initiator himself, actively initiating others into the tribe and therefore caring for the ongoing lifecycle of it. This basic pattern is still observed in traditional and modern tribal structures.

### *Ordeals of Initiation*

When new boys are entering school, or freshmen enter university or the army, they are usually treated with some kind of humiliation or entry ordeal to show what material they are made of. Only then are they admitted to the "academic tribe" or become "one of the boys" in the modern armed forces. Youth gangs often require prospective new members to show what they are made of before they are admitted to the tribe. Often they need to commit a minor crime, like stealing an apple or a car, and so passing the test. In this way the new recruit is bound to the group through his shared complicity in illegal activities, with an unspoken threat hanging over his head: if you ever leave the tribe, the world will know about your crime. Many present day tribes, like modern secret societies, have fairly rough initiation rites, having as rope tied around their neck to symbolize what is to happen should they ever betray the secrets of their society, or tattoos administered. Freemasonry, founded in 1717, still has nearly 500.000 men meeting in the monthly lodge in England alone. Not in spite of, but because of their "archaic" initiation rituals.

*Housechurches help release tribal dynamics for good*

The congregational church in a standard size of 80 to 150 attenders is one of the only structures which breaks the tribal mentality, and violates deep-seated feelings and traditional habits in the process. This pattern does not conform to inbuilt tribal patterns, and hems the natural flow of building relationship and social identity. The church is either much too large for the organic dynamics of the small band, or too small for providing "a village" for its members. The church has traditionally tried to overcome this by heavy organization and strong authority-figure leadership as well as highly structured worship-patterns. But, whenever the size of a Christian community comes close to either 20 or 500, one of the two numeric poles of the tribal pattern of a hunting band or a village, special social and tribal dynamics are released, which would be kept dormant otherwise.

Housechurches and larger celebrations can immediately recapture the social tribal dynamics of the "small hunting band" of around 20 people, and have their other needs met in larger gatherings like the "city church." Initiation rites like baptism and sharing of material wealth with the community. There is even a very powerful Christian equivalent to the minor crimes modern youth bands require from new members, which bond the new members to the tribe. It is the confession of sin. If someone confesses his sin to the housechurch, he may lose his face before the outside world and literally die to a life of double standards, but is accepted in grace and forgiveness and love by his new spiritual tribe.

In terms of linking housechurches together, Cellchurches tend to reflect the chiefdom-structure, as housechurches and their flat structure, linked together in mutually interdependent ways, reflect more the "headless" tribal pattern. This could be one of the reasons why Cellchurch might be more appropriate for "chiefdom cultures", and the housechurch more for democratic cultures.

*Change our teaching structures*

In an African country once the electricity went off, just as I was supposed to teach some 200 Pastors and Evangelists. I chose 6 disciples (those who knew English best), asked everyone else to pray for each other. Then I explained to my 6 "disciples" a simple lesson, which took me 15 minutes. Then I asked them to choose 6 disciples of their own, and tell them exactly what I had told them. Then those 36 disciples of my 6 disciples were to choose also 6 disciples each (now covering all 200 people), and teach them the very same lesson again. After that I asked one of the last generation-disciples, who had learned the lesson handed down through 2 generations, to stand in front and repeat the whole teaching to all of us - at the top of his booming voice. Once his teaching was right, he got a thumbs-up sign for OK; if he had introduced or been taught false teachings or "extra-flowery", he got a thumbs-down signal. As a result, not only was it good fun and saved electricity, but it made 43 of them to do actual teaching, where we could observe who of them are gifted and others who needed, let us say, more prayer.

How much do you really remember from your time of classroom style teaching in school, where a teacher explains a subject before a class, and they dutifully take notes so as not to fail in the unavoidable exam? This is arguably the most ineffective type of teaching available to mankind, yet we have got so much used to it that we reproduce it wherever we go, even in the life of the church. If we want to change the quality of teaching and learning, we need to change our structures accordingly, and move from static to kinetic learning. In the New Testament, the very model and way of teaching is geared at changing lifestyles through changing values. Since housechurch is a structure that emerges out of a heartbeat of discipleship, we again could start to teach each other how to live and how to teach, not just spoon-fed a subject, and then on to the next. In Hebrew tradition there are some rabbinical think schools. The subject is to learn how to think first, how to handle and use one's God given intellectual abilities, and then to be able to apply them towards any conceivable topic. Usually, students going through this process of learning to think first, and then looking into subjects, are able to handle even A-level exams with utter ease.

Kinetic or dynamic teaching abandons classroom settings, lengthy sermons or bible studies, and becomes again part of everyday life in the most natural place on earth, the home, where we could teach each other by example, by questions and answers, drawing in everybody into the teaching and learning process, building consensus, corporate understanding and therefore spiritual momentum, not individual headknowledge.

## 9. QSQ

*Values and content are first, methods and plans second, and growth and numbers come last: how to think Quality-Structure-Quantity*

### QSQ - Quality - Structure - Quantity

There is a wonderful North-African dish called Kouskous, or Qousqous, as I prefer to spell it, made of semolina, meat and vegetables, usually eaten sitting down with legs crossed on the floor in a tent around a large bowl, and forming small balls with the hand, popping it into your mouth.

When I am with my friends in Sudan, and it is eating time, we all will usually stand in line for our meal. Each pair of people is given only one plate, and they both eat the portion of rice and sauce from the same dish, using that most flexible of all forks, the hand. Once in a while someone will tap your shoulder, and, with the broadest possible smile, will transfer the leftovers of his own plate onto your plate, a sign of friendship and appreciation. As we allow even our juices to mix, our quality of fellowship and bonding is built. In many countries legal contracts are still sealed by having a meal together as a sign of mutual agreement.

The message of QSQ, which stands for Quality, Structure and Quantity, is simple: Reformation, revival, church growth and also churchplanting seem to follow those general three steps in that very order, each one related to the former one. Each one is incomplete - and even dangerous - without the other, and they follow logically and naturally.

### More better and smaller churches

The bottom line of what many of us see God doing these years around the world is this: He is restoring back Q, that is foundational New Testament, apostolic-prophetic Quality to His body; this new quality forms its own S, new Structures, they emerge from within, not through efforts from outside. Those new structures will, in turn, prove worthy and capable of fast growth and multiplication: the last Q, the Quantity aspect of it. This may very well mean many more, qualitatively truly "better" and - for some surprisingly - very much smaller churches than we are used to.

### Quality - no longer the silent victim

The church is always in the danger of reversing the order, and start with quantity and methods, rather than with quality. There are two main reasons for it: the church is constantly tempted to listen too much to impressive people who look at the outside like spiritual stars and sure winners. Their simple message is: we have found a "magic red button" to press for instant success and victory in Christianity. This way, they strongly influence a slightly depressed church through an unhealthy focus on mere quantity, and sometimes encourage it for purely evangelistic projects "that want to



touch as many people as quickly as possible". This mindset, almost completely foreign to the New Testament, is overly driven by numbers and goals alone, and it basically tells the church to act now, and think later; to shoot now, aim later; to evangelize now, follow up later; to succeed now, do the patchwork later; to see the success story happen today, leave the reformation and quality control for others; to rush on to save another country or city, and let the local or national churches take the blame for a less than ideal follow-up.

The other reason is very simply the "donor-dollar", the money given to missions and evangelism carrying the agenda of the one who gives the donation in it. The Golden Rule is still valid: the one who has the gold makes the rules. Reflecting the mentality of many - but not all! - financial donors today, this money is often even expected to yield a high return, preferably measurable in hard numbers and results.

#### The 1930s - when volume became the new God

"Once Quality was a natural fact of everyday trade", writes *Steve Smith* about in his management book "The Quality Revolution". *"Then, during the 1930s, mass thinking began to take over. First came mass production, then mass service: 'Pile them high, sell them quick'. Volume was the new God."* During the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was also the time when many modern day evangelistic operations and ministries were birthed, their general philosophy neatly fitting into the spirit of their time. An obsession with quantity and mass-ministry created a blindspot in the area of quality, which is often still evident today. Smith goes on to say: *"Many companies are blissfully unaware of the quality gap - the difference between the customers expectations and the achievement of the company, partly because they are only really looking at themselves (their measures, mostly internal, may show that they are still improving satisfactorily), and partly because they don't want to know"*.

*"Quickly, quickly"* - act now, think later! - so tells us *Francis Schaeffer*, *"is a word straight from hell"* - but we often greet it as a revelation from heaven. If a focus on quantity replaces our focus on quality, then we will be tempted to use structures, that is, means, methods, plans, techniques and projects, to attain only our numerical goals. Usually quality is the silent victim of this action-driven and success-oriented process.

I suggest, however, that we as the whole Body of Christ will have to pay the price of building a quality-church anyhow - either now or later.

#### The streets in Madras

Let me illustrate my point. At the time of writing this book I live in Madras, South India. Our city is hit every year by extensive monsoon rain. This torrential downpour washes away many streets, and they are left in dire need for repair. Due to a lack of a proper sewage system, it leaves half the city (and usually my office, too) flooded. After the rain stops, small construction groups of workers swarm all over the city, fill in those potholes with any conceivable material - dirt, sand, stones, pebbles, plastic bags and even pieces of wood, and patch it over with a generous layer of tar. Through

the onslaught of traffic, sun and further rain, this marvelous patchwork quickly deteriorates, the holes open here and there, and soon the road is ready for the next monsoon, mercifully initiating the repeating of the cycle. The steps taken here are quantity first (patch as many holes as quickly as possible), structure second (using fastworking groups of workers treating the streets superficially) - and the victim is quality. It helps that India is receiving generous development aid from western countries for just that very purpose, to build and rebuild its roads. As long as the money keeps pouring in, that process will probably not change - somehow or other it works, after all. The price for quality, with the help of subsidies from the West, is this: there is no real progress, only a maintaining of the Status Quo.

### Quality foundations

Although most comparisons fall short of their purpose, I suggest that the quality of the church is, in some ways, comparable to the quality of a house. It's quality depends highly on six issues: the character, wisdom and vision of the architect; the physical locality of the building site; the quality of its foundations; the building material used; the quality of the master builder, and the quality and enthusiasm of the workers.

Jesus has made it quite clear that God himself is the inventor, visionary and father of the church; Jesus himself, not just any sandy plot, is the rock and foundation for it (Mt. 7; 1. Cor 3:11), and Jesus sees the "right people" like Peter (Mt. 16:18) or "a man of peace" (Lk 10:6), not just any man, directly related to a possible starting point - or a "building site" - for the church. The apostolic and prophetic ministries are - related to the one who empowers those ministries - foundation - laying ministries for the church (Eph. 2:20); the company of the redeemed are the "living stones" built up together (1 Peter 2:5); and Jesus again is Himself the master builder (Mt 16:18), who uses apostolic people as His master craftsmen or expert builders (1. Cor 3:10).

### Who builds what

Still there is a big difference between "building a church" and the mechanical process of building a house. We cannot just take "six guaranteed principles" and, independent of its maker, build the house of God. God has wisely tied the whole process to Himself. In an act of grace and sovereignty, God reserves the right to give the increase as He likes, and supply the secret of growth whenever and wherever He pleases. Jesus, God-on-earth, has summed this up in His famous words: "I will build my church". I see four possible interpretations of this word, of which I suggest we should only favor the last one. The interesting part is, that most of these interpretations are subtle and unspoken:

1. "*We will build our church*" - that is, we in our own strength and traditional methods will build our own kingdoms. The result is just that, a man-driven religious cult. Flesh builds flesh.
2. "*We will build His church.*" This interpretation is more dangerous than the first one, because it appeals to the go-getters, the doers and activists in each culture,

and implies that we humans can build God's house; flesh can construct spirit, great human strategies and projects will usher in God's Kingdom. The result is usually the same as under 1., but has a more spiritually deceptive, and sometimes even a triumphalistic overtone to it. Some even have called this approach "modern witchcraft and magic," because it tries to use means other than the Holy Spirit for spiritual ends. The results are often enough manipulation and spiritual megalomania.

3. "*Jesus will build our church.*" This interpretation says, in effect, that Jesus uses his resources for our end; spirit builds flesh. We are God's chosen few," the right denomination or group, a holy - or even the one and only! - remnant, and Jesus has so chosen to build our church. Here humans are using God for human ends; the church comes first, and everything else is second to the goal of building a single denomination or organization, not his whole universal church. Jesus, to say it in a picture, pours his oil on our fire, and the result may very well be nothing more than a temporary human and religious kingdom. There is another downside to this thinking: if nothing grows and nothing happens, this must be God's will, since surely nothing is wrong with us.
4. "*Jesus will build His church.*" This implies that Jesus Himself is the master builder, and He offers a definite invitation for anyone of us to become His co-workers (Col. 4:11) and help Him in building up His church His way. This is somewhat humiliating, because it does not underline our human efforts very much, but rather stresses a spiritual partnership, with Jesus and His Spirit being the Senior Partner. The result will have God's stamp of approval, because he gave the very mandate to build Himself, and His own spiritual genes are engineered right into it. Spirit builds spirit. Only by the grace of God will we be able to appreciate the fact that this is the only way that emphasizes the right name in the credit line of all church growth and church planting endeavors: the Lamb of God.

#### Beyond renewal and reformation

Over the millennia, the great divide in Christianity has never really been between Denominations, Catholics and Protestants, or Charismatics or Non-Charismatics, but always between Spirit and Flesh, the breath of life and the odor of death, between man-made religion and movements of God's Spirit. In many countries, right up to today, quite a few renewal movements still struggle, some even for centuries, to renew traditional structures, either by calling the church back to the Word of God, the Spirit of God, or the original confession of faith of a particular church or denomination. When we read about prominent reformation leaders or even ask outstanding leaders of present day renewal movements, none of these three methods of renewal seem to truly work in the long run to the satisfaction of all involved. The answer may be more radical than that. Reformation and renewal of existing structures may simply not go deep enough. We may be using and following a spiritual genetical code, a methodic pattern which may be brilliant in comparison to other church movements and streams, but one which is still not quite up to God's norm. In short, if we compromise quality, no amount of quantity will ever do.

### Recapturing New Testament standards

God is good, and He therefore sets good standards for the Church of God. Normal, therefore, is only what stands up to God's norm, no matter what place a given concept of church has had in history or in our tradition, and how many people have agreed to it in the past. God's Kingdom is no democracy. Many Christians today feel strongly that God is simply calling the church back to New Testament standards with sound apostolic and prophetic foundations.

### When the meek inherit the Earth

This means, in practice, that God calls all of us away from a spirit of complacency to a spirit of revival; from superficiality to depth; from lukewarmness to true heat; from mediocrity to spiritual excellence; from the pursuit of pleasures to a life of passion; from living in a fake peace with the world to a state of war under God's martial law; from conforming to the patterns of this world to being transformed into the image of Christ; from a silly and costly behavioral pattern of trial and error to a prophetic mode; from a settler mentality to a pilgrim mentality; from a me-focus to a we-focus; and from individual thinking to corporate thinking; from hiding one's sin to living in the light; from proud boasting and preaching of ourselves to true strength in weakness, realizing that it is the meek that will inherit the earth, a statement of Jesus which turns any earthly wisdom on its head.

### Being before doing

Some of God's essential qualities are love, hope, faith, truth, light, and compassion. The essence of God, His true qualities are not related so much to what He does, but to what He is. Because God first "is" the great "I am", the one who simply "was at the beginning", and then only "does" what He does and did what He did, as an outflow of His personality, so also are we called to first "be, and then to do." Because God is a lover, he loves. What God does, shows us who He is, and because He is a good God - a quality God! - His actions are good and of a supernatural quality. That's why the Gospel is "Good News", because it is the solid news about a supernaturally good God redeeming mankind from terrible sin by sacrificing His own son, liberating them from a bondage too much to liberate themselves of, and releasing those captive from a system of lies that comes straight from hell, and providing them with a new system to live out their new life in Christ, a structure called the church, before which all hell is rendered powerless. The gates of hell will not prevail against the church which I build, says Jesus.

### Structure

Structure is, according to the Oxford Dictionary, "*the way things are put together*", how things are organized. Since the Bible describes the local church as the Body of Christ, the essence and qualities of God will have to be reflected in the local church,

not in only one perfect and holy individual. For God, good does not at all equal numerical success. Much of God's qualities are relational, interdependent. They cannot be lived out individually, in a vacuum. It requires at least two to love. That also means that many of God's qualities, His spiritual genes, will be lived out in a corporate manner: they will be seen in our lifestyle, the way we follow Jesus. All that requires some structure, a more or less systematic way of doing the things which we do. I am not favoring a perfect, perfectionist or any other legalistic way of structure. The Bible encourages us to deal with each other with grace, forgiveness, love *and truth* - not truth alone! - , in a spirit of warmth and mutual appreciation, at the same time not ignoring the supernatural pattern and purpose of the church of God, which is, for example, not a feel-good club for mere socializing, but has a divine destiny.

#### Structure and culture

Jesus became flesh and lived amongst us. He chose Bethlehem, about 2.000 years ago, a very particular spot in time and space. He lived, ate, spoke and related to people of His time in a special way, which is difficult for anyone to emulate because we live in a different time and culture. His incarnation meant that the eternal God became one of us, and we could see God in Jesus for the first time: *"If you see me, you see the Father,"* says Jesus. If Jesus were to be incarnated today in Southern France, He would behave and act most probably very similarly - and at the same time very differently - to the way he lived in Palestine. The quality of His life, His principles and destiny, would be the same, but the way He would speak and act, might be quite different. This means that also the internal quality of the church, the Body of Christ, might be the same in each culture and time, but will differ greatly in its style, the structural outworking of its life.

#### Preach the church or preach Jesus

*Vincent Donevan*, a missionary to the Maasai-tribe, explains in his book "Christianity rediscovered", that historically Christian mission to this African people-group has been mostly agricultural, social, focusing on schools etc. It hardly had any effect on the Maasai, says Donevan. He asked himself the question: Can I leave behind everything the other missionaries do, and just take the message of Jesus to them? As a result, he saw "whole villages come to Jesus." He sums his experience up in two lessons: Preach the church, and the response will look like the church that sent you out. Preach Jesus, and the response looks very different. The second lesson was, that he rediscovered the Gospel himself afresh in the process, as "the church became flesh" again in unchurched cultures and started to tell its own story.

#### Confusing culture with spiritual realities

Some young Christians from a western nation reported in an Asian church about some outreach they were doing in an Eastern nation. They had genuine tears of brokenness in their eyes talking about the people worshipping dead idols in temples - and did not

see the TV's running hours on end in their country worshipping living idols of sport, music or film. They had broken hearts over the abject material poverty, and did not see the spiritual and emotional poverty of countless millions suffering from loneliness and meaninglessness in their home country. They could not believe that people sacrifice flowers and even animals for their gods, overlooking that it is quite normal to sacrifice even children and whole families on the holy altar of success back home. They marveled at the smoke and incense-offerings "those pagans do to their Gods," and did not see for one moment the smog caused by every individualist jampacking the roads with their own car, industry polluting the atmosphere, and cigarette smokers polluting the rooms. They said "these children here are so dirty!", and did not realize that most children in their own country do not obey their parents and have and unbelievable dirty language, harboring fantasies most children in Asia or the Middle East would simply abhor. In short, they saw and judged the outside, not the inside; they were shocked by the culture, not by the spirit behind it, and they failed to see that it is no better at home than in Asia. Fallenness and sinfulness only looks different on the outside, it's quality is essentially the same everywhere.

#### National sins and blessings

Like a human being, each nation and each tribe at each given time in history has its own way of doing things, its own values, language, patterns of behavior, its communication systems, its do's and don'ts, its special strengths and weaknesses, blessings and sins. And as there are liars and lawyers, murderers and mechanics, drunkards and drivers amongst men, you will find that each nation has a personality of its own, with strengths and weaknesses, special sins and special blessings, gifts and curses. Most nations and tribes - like individual humans - usually have a tendency to overlook the blindspot in the area of their weaknesses and sins, and tend to overestimate their strengths, and under estimate their weakness. Which nation comes to your mind when you think of national hallmarks like perfectionism, fearfulness, shyness, insecurity, megalomania, laziness, fear, pride, superficiality, militancy, obsession with martial arts, lust, gluttony, stinginess, corruption, loneliness, neutrality?

#### Patterns of the world - patterns of God

One of the most fascinating words for me in the New Testament is the Greek word "stoicheia" (Col 2:8;20; Gal 4:3), which, similarly to the Greek word "aion" in Rom 12:1-2 means "pattern, lifeforce, principles." "*Do not conform to the principles of this world*", says Paul. Originally the word stoicheia meant the principal elements of the world, like earth, water, fire, air. However, Paul attributes a much more spiritual significance to the "patterns of the world"; he seems to see them like spiritual natural laws of a fallen world, demonically empowered principles that have formed it's own traditions and institutions and "cultures", which "automatically" take over to control each person born within it's jurisdiction. "You cannot understand Europe without the dimension of the demonic," said German psychoanalyst *C.G. Jung*.

### The two magnets

I would liken the effects of stoicheias to a gigantic magnetic field. As some of us have observed in school as a little experiment, once you sprinkle iron filings on a magnetic field, they "automatically" arrange themselves according to the magnetic patterns. If, "human iron-filings" are sprinkled - born - onto such a pattern, they immediately start arranging themselves, and, with the help of some spiritual peer pressure, stay arranged that way. This is no magic principle, but part of the fact that this world has "fallen into sin". Sin can corrupt and pollute land, teaches the Bible (Dt. 24:4; Jer. 16:18; Num 35:33; 2 Chron. 7:14; Ezr 9:11; Gen 6:11). From Adam and Eve onwards we know that sin has a tendency to spread. We can therefore see sins of individuals - demonically enhanced, empowered and encouraged - growing into sins of groups of people, growing into community habits, growing into local traditions, developing into national institutions - and ultimately forming cultures, shaping the spirits, minds and the thinking patterns of millions of people almost "automatically". This would influence the human thinking within each culture specially in the very elementary aspects of life, like, work, eating, money, honor, shame, children, how to behave and even how to think. If a person is born and brought up within a particular culture, he would also have to drink and inherit this spiritual paradigm and pattern with his mothers milk, becoming part of an overpowering spiritual system of "stoicheias and aions" into which he is introduced through the sin of his parents - and ultimately through his own sin. From his perspective, however, this person would consider himself as absolutely "normal".

The kingdom of God, in this picture, enters a whole different dimension to this setup. A new very powerful magnet, so to speak, is lowered from heaven to earth, creating it's own magnetic field and influence, and changing the way people used to think, act and behave. Ultimately some or many "human iron-filings" change their magnetic allegiance and arrange themselves into this new magnetic field of the Kingdom of God. This causes no small confusion, since the two magnetic systems - the "patterns of this world" and the Kingdom of God - are not the same, and pull people into opposite directions, arranging them in very different patterns. Even the very pattern of life of the people concerned, therefore, has an inbuilt message: it simply and clearly tells to which system you belong. Through this, the very lifestyle of Christians becomes a battlecry, and may be the real down to earth arena of what we may call "spiritual warfare".

### Three ways of churchplanting

The Gospel of the Kingdom challenges and changes the very essence, the core beliefs and values of a sinful, fallen and ungodly world, country, people group and culture. It crucifies the sinful patterns, and is able to redeem and use powerfully those aspects of a culture reflecting and institutionalizing the blessings of God.

In each culture there are therefore essentially three ways of building - and planting - the church:

1. Trying to fit into the "patterns of the world" in a given culture and nation, and arrange the church as neatly as possible into the accepted cultural pattern. This habit - sometimes hiding behind what is called "felt-need oriented evangelism" or "State-Church Christianity" will look at the outside probably like a quick success; but usually fails to penetrate deeply and cut through the spiritual roots and invisible plumbing through which sinful patterns and now culturally accepted habits are sustained. The result is usually an adapted church, often with a phenomenal initial growth rate - but an untold and long-lasting depression afterwards, whereby the church is sooner or later absorbed, losing its power and finally its identity - it has merged with the patterns of this world.
2. The other extreme is to ignore the patterns of this world, of the local culture, the local "way of doing things," and to create and remain on a "Holy Island" so separate from the world that almost all meaningful communication and interaction breaks down. This mentality usually creates an "island syndrome", and the church remains very different and therefore suspicious, truly foreign, small and again powerless to change people and disciple and transform a country.
3. The third way, which I am advocating, is not a middle-of-the-road-compromise, but to find a truly godly mix between redeeming and crucifying a given culture. Here we cannot rely so much on human wisdom and anthropological insights alone, but on divine revelation, prophecy, and sound apostolic thinking.

This is also one of the many reasons why churchplanting as a global partnership is so important. God may use us to help each other recognize culturally and nationally developed spiritual roadblocks, blindspots and strongholds, which we have imbibed with our mothers milk. We need spiritual cross-fertilizing, helping each other to break through the inherited stoicheia-patterns, without forsaking the good and godly parts of our cultures and countries, and to bring out the best in each other in synergy with one another.

#### Dancing to the same Gods

The idea of the happy savages living in peace with nature with the need to be protected by anthropologists and ethnologists from the outside world reinforced by government agencies is overlooking the grim truth: The life of the typical savage is just that, savage, wild, forced to live in overpowering spiritual circumstances, subject to usually cruel laws, vulnerable to unreal demands of tradition, customs and demons, who suck their life power out of them and throw them into an endless cycle of pleasing and appeasing distant and angry gods. This is not much different from a modern yuppie in the West dancing to the tune of a career rise, appeasing the cruel and costly God of fashion, and trying to forget all problems in one constant escape. He, like the proverbial savage, both live the same lie, have arranged themselves according to the same spiritually magnetic pattern, and are in need of the same redemption, but in very different forms.



### A National church and the redemptive purpose of nations

Each nation or people group has its own identity and character, almost like a corporate personality. From there - and the fact that God is a God of the nations - we can conclude that each nation and people group has its own corporate identity, and therefore needs to grow its own type of church - with its own structures and "ways of organizing things". Jesus has to be incarnated in each nation and soil, and the result, His church, will be identical in its quality but very different in structure from the church in the neighboring tribe and country. In addition to this, the collective Body of Christ in a nation is called by God to find and fulfil its very own national redemptive purpose, to function within its very own collective supernatural gift, to fill its strategic place in God's global economy which no one else can take. Mission in each nation has therefore three main goals: 1. to develop a national ecclesiology, that is a national and not foreign expression of the Church; 2. to disciple the nation through a multiplication of this type of church; 3. to define its own contribution towards world missions, according to the redemptive purpose God has ordained for each nation.

### More Southern-Baptist churches for Northern Iraq?

If, for example, the church is incarnated in a highly militaristic and urban culture, where powerful kings have ruled society for a long time and the ordinary folk, deeply insecure, still feel the overriding need to be in the shadow of a strong general-leader, and want to rally around a standard flag-bearer because otherwise they would feel lost in the crowd - how would a church in this culture look like? The church would have an aroma of an army, organized according to military rank and file, where everyone has a title or a badge to show his position, and where the all-important role of a senior leader is beyond question.

But how would the church look like in a rural and tribal society, where women are the decision makers? It would look very different to the church, grown in a country with a basic democracy, valuing individual freedom beyond anything else, where strong leaders are highly suspicious and flags are a symbol of a militant past they want to forget as quickly as possible.

Knowing the visionary, gracious and humble hearts of many of my Southern-Baptist Brothers, I could not find a more suitable illustration to this principle than to stress the fact that in this sense that I have described "we do not need more Southern Baptist churches in Northern Iraq." I know they will gladly understand - or forgive me with a good southern chuckle for this statement.

### Same quality - different structures

The sum total of this is, that the church can be essentially of the same spiritual quality - however in terms of its structure can and will look quite different from a church

incarnated in a different culture. The western world is very much brought up according to a Judeo-Christian value pattern, married for centuries to a Greek and Roman system of logic. This does not function "east of the Jordan" very well. We must never compromise in the God-given quality aspects of the Kingdom of God, but be flexible and truly prophetic in the way we arrange things in the church, in the area of our structures. We might always want to look for what anthropologists call a "dynamic equivalent", a creative way to explain the unexplainable, like grapes to the Eskimos, snow to the Sudanese and sunshine to the English, that is true to the original message, but adapts the form to make sense to the listener. Quality is God-given, the structures will differ and are flexible expressions of the Body of Christ incarnated over and over again into a local and organic expression of the Church.

This is also one of the reasons that church "models" are very difficult to transplant, translate and "contextualize" into a different setting. We can learn from underlying principles of each church, but transferring the whole model itself will most probably lead to failures and delay the process of Christ taking root in any native soil.

### **Create - not Copy**

Many pastors I meet tell me: "I tried this, I tried that, and it did not work!" I suggest, for example, that today there would be about 200.000 Pastors worldwide, who suffer under what I call the "Yonggi-Cho depression." *Yonggi Cho* is a most unusual Korean pastor, extremely gifted and capable of leading people and building a church movement. But most have not understood that his message is not: "Copy me, and you get the same results!", but "Learn from the principles which God has shown me, and maybe God will bless you, too!". It is one thing a Pastor teaches, and another thing what people hear. This is why many have not understood that there are two reasons for Pastor Cho's success: The obedient Yonggi Cho himself, and the church growth principles he has discovered along the way. As a result, many followed his example and, unknowingly or willingly, have tried to copy him. Very few extremely gifted men have succeeded to a degree - and most have failed. The latter group feels today more guilty and depressed than before, because they honestly feel "I have tried it, it did not work" - a clear symptom of the pathological pattern I call "copyism", which has grown into a dangerous and deadly disease which has stricken many churches around the globe today.

Some time ago I sat down with Pastor *Colton Wickramaratne* in Colombo, Pastor of one of the largest and most dynamic churches in Sri Lanka. Once someone told him with excitement about "*the wonderful model of Evangelism called Evangelism Explosion. Pastor James Kennedy's Church,*" so Colton was told, "*in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, literally exploded with this program.*" And the dry remark of Pastor Colton? "*How can I explode with someone else's explosion! Do I not sell myself too cheap by denying the creative and powerful potential God has given me - and each of us? As long as I am busy copying someone else, how can I be truly myself? By copying other peoples story and model I might fail, therefore, to find and*

*create the one single way forward which God has designed only for me - and no one else!"*

In Europe, from 1986 to 1992 many churches have copied *John Wimber* and his model of the Vineyard church. As a result, numerous churches today have a new, unwritten liturgy: 1 hour worship Vineyard style, 45 minutes sermon, 20 minutes ministry time. Since 1994 John Wimbers model to be followed has been replaced in some churches by *John Arnotts* model of the former Airport Vineyard church in Toronto, Canada. A few years later quite a number of Pastors tell us that they are just now recovering from what I call a "post Toronto depression". *"But how wonderful,"* a Pastor told me, *"that we now have Willowcreek. Now that really is it!"*

Wonderful? I thought, and was swallowing down my helpless remark trying to tell him that I am already seeing the post-Willowcreek depression beginning to grip many churches.

#### Six easy steps to convert a blessing into a curse

Let us slip into the devils shoes for a few seconds: is "copyism" not a perfect trap? For many churches, everything starts so wonderfully. Someone experiences God's blessing because he has been obedient to His word and spirit. Someone else tells the story and it appears as a testimony; the third one creates a model out of this experience, which then is copied and cloned by a fourth one. A fifth one finally suggests: "lets create an institution around this new model!", and goes on to start franchises all over the world; and the sixth one forms all this into a new law, which judges everyone who chooses to do things different. I call this "the six sure and easy steps to transform a blessing into a curse." If we put our hands to the plough and look back (or abroad?), how do we dare to think we are fit for the work in the Kingdom of God?

It is high time that we see all that good, creative and powerful potential in the Body of Christ resurrected and nurtured, which our Creator-God has long ago put into all of us and which has almost suffocated under too many layers of copied blessings. That would mean, that we have to work much less. It would also mean, that we have to constantly learn and research, which ways God is using in our part of the world and in our society and culture, to win people for Himself and His church. Could it be that our addiction to models from abroad, which we then try to endlessly "adapt and contextualize", in reality only reveals a deep leadership crisis and a widespread insecurity of what we should do? And, even more dangerous, could this reveal a serious deafness to what the Holy Spirit is trying to say to our churches which we need to repent and get rid of?

But let us remain realistic. Statistics reveal that 80% of all Pastors will keep on simply copying other models and programs. 15 % of all pastors will take on other models and change them a little to make them fit better. Only 5% are true inventors of their own ways and models.

The core things of Christianity defy the unredeemed brain and, like love, faith, hope, are mostly non-logic and appeal only to those who are childlike. I have therefore a very "unrealistic" proposal to make: should we not, in the name of Jesus and in the power of the Holy Spirit, confuse all those statisticians out there and reverse these sad figures? How? Stop copying, and start creating in the name of the Creator-God, who lives in all of us, whether we are pastors or not.

This way our churches would pass what *Bill Beckham* calls the photocopy test. If a church replicates itself with only dimmer versions of itself, then it's life and nature is simply not good enough.

#### Do not miss out on God's prophetic word for you

There is a difference between models which we can imitate, and principles, from which we might learn. Studying, growing and multiplying churches may reveal underlying principles behind their growth; but we need to avoid the mistake of copying or imitating their model which may not work in all situations and contexts. Structures, a way of doing things, and so-called "proven methods" therefore can be very dangerous. If they have proven anything, then this: you are in danger of losing your God-given originality if you copy them. You might miss out on the prophetic word God has for you and your unique situation, if you keep trying to copy somebody else's success even down to the very structures. But there is more to it.

If God truly is in the business of changing our understanding of church, urging us to rediscover His original New Testament quality of church and see it incarnated and therefore truly "planted" in many nations and people groups, then this will also dramatically affect all our structures, methods and plans. What we thought of as a "proven churchplanting method" or a "successful evangelistic strategy" might, in the light of this, turn out simply to be a roadblock for what God really wants to do, a copied and faded blessing, sidetracking people from God's original path for a nation to be disciplined. If we discover a new way "to be church", this will change the way we "do church." Only a new revelation of church itself will lead to a structural reformation.

#### Quantity

How long did it take the New Testament housechurch-movement to "fill Jerusalem with the teaching" of Jesus Christ (Acts 5:28)? Maybe 2-3 years, maybe even less. Again, quantity started with quality, with passionate tears in the eyes of the man who cried for this city; and not too long later we see the very same city filled with the teaching of the one who had his eyes filled with tears for it. What stands out in the Jerusalem experience was that the growth was like yeast or sour dough, it was infectious, like a virus spreading, transforming everything it touched with a dynamic power. It was as if Christianity had reached a critical mass, and became a self-propelling chain reaction and could not be safely contained nor controlled any longer,

except by God. Each believer was a particle of yeast, carrying a core genetic code he was able to deposit through every open door into any possible house, and transform each cell with its Kingdom-of-God-genetic-code into a part of the Kingdom of God, into a housechurch.

### Spiritual DNA

Beyond the initial work of Austrian Monk *Gregor Mendel* (1822-1884) it was the American Biologists *Francis Crick* and *James Watson*, who discovered in 1953 the chemical structure of DNA (deoxyribonucleic acid), the basic building block of life. DNA contains sugar molecules (Deoxyribose) and phosphate molecules in a regular pattern, who form the so-called DNA-spine. Attached to the sugar molecules are one of four "bases" or "genetic letters", called Adenine, Cytosine, Guanine, Thymine. The way those four "letters" A, C, G and T are put together, makes up the information itself contained in this ingenious pattern. This genetic letter-combination makes up the chromosomes or seed-structure of life, and are responsible for the species, size, shape and quality of the organism which is created out of it.

The powerful effects of a spreading virus-infection depends very much on the power of the DNA of the virus. The virus infects a perfectly normal cell, and introduces its own DNA to it, whereby, the "host cell" is transformed into the image of the virus - and becomes sick. Similarly, if we are all carriers of a spiritual and heavenly DNA of the Kingdom of God, containing the pattern of the church right within everyone of us, everything we touch will also be infected or at least affected with this wonderful disease and transformed into the image of Christ on earth, literally forming his body according to the genetical code everywhere we go. The result would be growth through infection, a true multiplication system like yeast in a dough, almost unstoppable in terms of quantity. If the quality of the DNA is right, all we need is to work towards a critical mass by building up an appropriate structure, and leave it to the "God of Numbers" to what heights he himself wants to raise the quantity of it all.

### The right prototype is more important than full warehouses

All this leads us to a painful but pressing question: If our present-day quality of church with our present-day structures, and if existing types of churches and church-based methods and programs do not necessarily lead to the discipling of the nations, qualitatively and quantitatively, what will?

In the world of business, research and development are two main and very important areas. Most attention is given (and money spent) to develop the right product, a tested and working prototype, before going into mass production. The right prototype is more important than a warehouse full of low-quality products. The slightest error in the original can cause catastrophic results with costly call-back actions, once the assembly-lines start running. Management consultants tell us that "it is 50 times easier to start again than to correct a problem." I believe we do well to spend the bulk of our

time to develop an appropriate quality-prototype of church in each nation or people group first, and only then develop strategies for church multiplication.

This way of thinking, however, can also prove to be a genuine trap for people who are fascinated with quality and have a slightly perfectionist attitude. So often our greatest weakness is hiding in the shadow of our greatest strength. The danger is, that we might for ever work in our spiritual laboratories and never get our product out of the experimental stage, because we feel it is not yet ripe or good enough. A sure sign for a really good prototype is that it soon gets out of our hands anyway. Either it will be stolen through industrial espionage, sold by a corrupt scientist for a ridiculous sum to a fascinated sponsor, taken red-hot from the hands of the scientists straight to the sales department, or, if it is an organic thing we are working on, just stand up all by itself and walk out on us.

How big is big, and how many are many?

"But the rock that struck the statue became a huge mountain and filled the whole earth," explains Daniel in Dan 2:35 and 44, obviously referring to God's heavenly Kingdom, partly expressed by the church. It is obvious that the number of the redeemed will once reach proportions, John in his revelation felt "*no one can count*" (Rev. 7:9). God "*wants all man to be saved*" (1. Tim 2:4), "*the whole dough been worked through*" by the yeast (Mt 13:33). He will "make the nations and the ends of the earth the inheritance and possession" of Jesus (Ps. 2:8), and "the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of God as the waters cover the sea" (Hab 2:14). The vehicle to make known "*the manifold wisdom of God*," says Eph. 3:10, is the church, obviously spread around the earth in truly global proportions.

Content with a relatively full hell and a relatively empty heaven?

With more than 6 billion people populating the planet, there are more than 25% of the people alive today out of the possibly 20 billion humans that have lived and died since the beginning of history combined. Jesus says that he came into the world, not to judge the world, but that the world, through him, might be saved. Many Christians - and even many of our mission strategies - seem to be overwhelmingly satisfied with scratching the surface, winning a few, not "saving the world." The fact is, that even if many of our contemporary strategies succeed, we would still be left with a relatively full hell and a relatively empty heaven. Can we truly say: if 5% are saved, it is enough! If we win a handful out of each nation, our mission is completed. Really?

If we are getting too accustomed to a medium-effective church and mediocre missionary results in the past, it might wrongly lead us to believe that the future will be also somewhat like the past. This will limit our expectation through the blindfolds of our experience, and we would, looking back from our plough, be found unfit for the work in the Kingdom of God (Luke 9:62). We may reluctantly accept a vision "to win 10 or 20 percent" of the population as "realistic", because according to our methods and experiences this might be possible; but the real reason might be, that we

may not be able to imagine anything beyond that, and inwardly think whether anything more really is God's will. Is it not up to God's election? I do not fully know, and I am afraid of easy answers. But I know this: God has elected the elect mainly for the purposes of the non-elect.

#### The God who wants to be pleaded with

In Genesis 18, the first patriarch Abraham awkwardly bargains with God over the fate of Sodom and Gomorrah, God granting him enormous freedom and influence, against Abraham's suspicion that God will become angry with his audacious requests. In Ezekiel 22, God is looking for an intercessor to stand in the gap, to literally stave off his divine judgement on the nation; finding none, God goes ahead with the prophesied destruction, a case in which God infers that this clearly did not need to happen. Jesus tells of the persistent widow, who is blessed only because of her refusal to take no for an answer (Lk. 18:1-8). Moses and Paul both went on record with God that they would personally be willing to be damned, to have their own salvation revoked, if somehow God would save their countrymen.

#### Audacious and ridiculously bold prayer

Few Christians today would stand up to the Sovereign Almighty the way Abraham and Moses did. They virtually said, "Not so, Lord!"

They had the audacity to question the divine intention, based on their human understanding of the character, glory, power and love of God. They appealed to God on the basis of His promised mercy, on the basis of the shame that would be brought to His name throughout the nations if He finished off his own people.

If we know one thing about prayer, it is that we are supposed to pray "according to the will of God," according to God's deepest desires. We know that God, Maker of all, desires that none should perish, that all be brought to the knowledge of the truth, that all be brought to repentance, that all be saved. Is God waiting to answer a pleading prayer from around the world that has not yet been prayed by a hundred million followers of Jesus who will not take no for an answer, who will only be satisfied with a heaven that is full and a hell that is (relatively) under-populated? What could possibly hinder this from happening?

#### Overcoming strongholds in our own mind

This type of intercession most certainly involves the breaking down of the stronghold in our own minds concerning the possibilities of God's future for earth and its peoples. Argentinean Evangelist *Ed Silvoso* coined the following definition for a spiritual stronghold, found in his book "That none should perish!":

*A spiritual stronghold is a mindset, impregnated with hopelessness, which causes us to accept as unchangeable, that which we know to be contrary to the will of God.*

If we refuse, for whatever reason, to pray "that none should perish" and all be saved, would not this very refusal be in itself a "spiritual stronghold"? A blockage, a "hard ground" in our own head? Would we not have to develop churchplanting and mission strategies after a break through in our own mind and spirit first, overcoming any hopeless and limiting thoughts and reasoning in the power and spirit of the One who came to save the world?

Satan will triumph over every unnecessary person who is in hell because of a sleeping church, a limited vision, a middle-of-the-road approach and Christians only defending themselves, instead of "prevailing and plundering hell". What did Jesus mean, after all, when his one definitive statement about the church was that "the gates of hell would not prevail against it?" Contrary to popular thinking and translations, the Greek wording in Mt. 16:18 does not suggest the "gates of hell" storming against the church, but the church storming against the gates of hell. Whatever or whoever or wherever those gates are, they will be unable to withstand. Is it the church which will, in the end, crash the entrance of hell and somehow depopulate it, since hell, we know, was not prepared for people in the first place? (Mt 25:41).

If there was ever a time, given the present population explosion, where even the slightest adjustment to the audacity of our pleading prayer, the size of our vision and daring of our strategies will have maximum consequences, it is now.

#### The little flock that inherits the Kingdom

Many have said that the "little flock" Jesus speaks of in Luke 12 means that the church will always be a small minority. Jesus actually does not say that at all. Maybe he spoke quite literally about a "little flock", the normal small size of his church, gathering in groups of around 10 or 15 in homes. They are to be small flocks with a large inheritance: "the father is pleased to give them the kingdom." The unimpressive structure of a housechurch should not fool anyone about its spiritual, moral, economic and even political potential: it is God's delight in turning the standards of the world on its head and let the meek, as Jesus puts it, probably with a "meek structure", inherit the earth.

God and His vision of what His "small flock" can and will do is probably "as high above the earth as the heavens", and will not only stretch us all mightily as we try to come to grips with God's global vision, but leave us completely speechless even in our abilities to "comprehend in part." The small flock of a large God may be bigger than the large flock of a small God.



The smaller the church, the larger its growth potential

In a worldwide research project, German Church Growth researcher Christian Schwarz has studied the average number of people added to a local church, typically over a five-year period:

<i>Size of church in attendance</i>	<i>people added in 5 years</i>	<i>growth in terms of percentage of the whole church</i>
1-100 (average 52)	32	63
100-200	34	23
200-300	39	17
300-400	25	7
1000+ (average 2.856)	112	4

A church between 1-100 attenders (average size in his research: 52) won 32 new people over a period of 5 years, and grew from 52 to 84 attenders, which is a growth of 63 percent.

In contrast, a large or even megachurch above 1.000 people (average size in his research: 2.856) won 112 new people in five years, which is a growth of 4 percent.

The difference in growth rate even between a church statistically, under 100 and a church between 100 and 200 people is very significant already, the smaller church showing almost three times the growth rate than the larger church. This startling research shows also that a church of 2.856, which is 56 times bigger than an average "small church" of 52, wins only little over 3 times more people than the small church.

In other words: If we would take the megachurch and divide it into 56 churches of 51 persons each, they would - statistically - win an average of 1.792 people in the same five year period, 16 times more than if the megachurch would remain a megachurch. From a different perspective, the *average* Megachurch-structure *prevents*, therefore, 1680 people (that is, 1.792 minus 112) from being won every 5 years. The bottom line result of this research shows, that small churches are much more effective to attract people. The relationship is as simple as a see-saw game on the playground: statistically, in the overwhelming majority of all cases, as quantity goes up, growth potential goes down.

The Quantum leap from organized to organic growth

What Schwarz does not show us, however, is what happens if you compare the growth potential of the organic housechurch with the organized and traditional "small church" according to the congregational pattern. It would be like comparing mustard-seed growth with adding stones to a pile of rocks. The growing congregational model usually grows by addition, the housechurches usually grow by multiplication. One

system will result in linear growth, the other in exponential growth. Although we have no global empirical figures for comparison, the signs are very clear that the growth potential still continues to grow as the church size continues to go down. Many housechurches with an average size of typically 12 report a multiplication or cell-duplication rate of once every 6 to 9 months, in revival situations every 2-3 months. If we take a "worst-case scenario" of starting problems in the first year and no multiplication at all, and then a slow doubling rate every 12 months of a given housechurch, the housechurch would then grow each year exponentially through multiplication. The first year in this scenario would see no growth, but sorting out the prototype and overcoming initial problems. In the second year the church would double into two churches, from two to four the third year, from four to eight the fourth year, and from eight to sixteen the fifth year. Let us further assume that one out of four churches will die, or become dysfunctional, split or have any other problem. This still would leave us with twelve housechurches with a combined attendance of  $12 \times 12 = 144$  people. This single housechurch has won  $144 - 12 = 132$  people in five years, which translates into a phenomenal growth rate of 833 percent. That is 13 times the growth rate of the already "fast growing small church", and more than 200 times the growth rate of a megachurch of 2.856 people during the same period. In fact, the "small housechurch" has won 132 people in 5 years, whereby the megachurch has won only 112 people during the same period. If we look at the same statistics as above, but having added the housechurch into the picture, the statistics would look like this:

<i>Size of church in attendance</i>	<i>people added in 5 years</i>	<i>size after 10 years</i>	<i>growth in terms of percentage of the whole church</i>
<b>housechurch of 12</b>	<b>132</b>	<b>3.456</b>	<b>833</b>
1-100 (average 52)	32	133	63
100-200 (average 150)	34	185	23
200-300 (average 250)	39	293	17
300-400 (average 350)	25	375	7
1000+ (average 2.856)	112	2970	4

The really interesting part, of course, is the continuation of the multiplication process of the housechurch, which would soon be able to reach almost unheard of proportions. I have added another column in the table above, which calculates the statistical overall size of each church if it continues to grow at the same rate it grew the previous 5 years. The housechurch would have become a housechurch movement of almost 3.500 people (I have again deducted 25 % failure rate), and would have overtaken the "megachurch" already.

All of us will have come across number-games and strategies to save the world, and I agree very much, that statistics of this sort should not be taken too literally. For us, they only serve the purpose to point out the explosive growth potential of the organic housechurch.

### Smaller churches are usually better churches

Another factor which many have known or at least felt before, which is backed up now by some empirical data through Christian Schwarz' study, is this: as the size of the church goes up, usually the quality goes down. A smaller percentage of the overall attenders are using their spiritual gifts in larger churches than in smaller churches; the smaller the church, the better the quality of fellowship, and finally: large churches have a larger tendency to transform attenders into passive consumers of a thrilling program than small housechurches, for whom the involvement of almost everyone is absolutely vital.

### A shop-window of God in walking distance of every person

If all people should not only hear and read, but "see and understand" the gospel (Rom 15:21), and if the economic situation in the next few decades remains basically the same, which means that a great percentage of people will not have private transportation, there would be a logical answer to this logistic problem:

*We should work, in an united effort, towards the goal of placing a church in walking distance of every person on earth.*

In order to make people "see how they love each other", we would literally have to place the church, the Body of Christ, as "a shop-window of God" into the neighborhood of every person on the planet. More and more people are now catching hold of this type of apostolic goals as a personal vision for themselves, their movements, their cities, people groups, countries, states, regions and countries.

## 10. Fathering the next Generation

*Who will do all the work?*

Who will be the people starting all those necessary housechurches, who will be doing the fivefold ministries, and where will all those people come from? Who will do all the work? Ultimately, we would all agree that it will have to be ordinary people made extraordinary by God, who, like in the old days, may still smell of fish, perfume and revolution. If Elders will father housechurches, we will simply have to spot and develop potential elders. Elders are people of wisdom and reality, and typically fathers or mothers of families. There are already many "family ministries" existing today. Could it be that we may be actually doing most of the training and developing of elders - and therefore churchplanters, but we have often not seen the connection between the role of sound and healthy families and churchplanting?

### Policemen without uniforms?

Leadership development within our traditional structures has often been to prepare people to grow up in order to fit into the existing structure to maintain it, and if possible to extend it. Leaders have often been "made" by prescribing authority to them, "ordaining" them. In many countries, however, this type of authority is deeply suspicious. Many have seen political or religious leaders with honey on their lips and a iron whip in their hand. One of this groups is what is called "Generation X", the bulk of the present young generation in the West. The last type of authority, which Generation-Xers - and other groups like post-communist Russians - will accept, is institutionalized authority, prescribed from above, authority which needs a superstructure to authorize it with titles, badges, medals and uniforms. Imagine a policeman, who, in his spare time, is standing on a road-crossing without his uniform, trying to direct the traffic. He will be ridiculed, ignored or even run over by cars, because he does not wear his uniform. Many churches feel like this unhappy policeman already, sensing that the population does not take the religious collars, crosses, colorful shirts, robes and headgear all too serious, because they feel that the life of Church as they have experienced it does not match the revolutionary message of the Gospel they sometimes hear. As a result, they take the liberty to ignore Church uniforms, and authority prescribed and ordained from a distant superstructure. They require, in other words, leadership that is earned amongst them, proven in gifted servanthood on a daily basis.

### Does our leadership-training truly develop leaders?

Traditionally we have been asking God for "flinging out workers into the harvest", praying for him to provide more people. As the twelve disciples did this, they became an immediate answer to their own prayers- they got flung out themselves first (Mt 9 and 10). If we truly desire to see more people involved in taking on responsibilities in the Kingdom of God, we will invariably be involved ourselves and drawn into the process. For this purpose we today arrange recruiting conferences for young people,

see them dedicate themselves at "altars", arrange mission mobilization events, beat the drum for our mission group or organization, conduct leadership and training seminars, establish and multiply bible schools and theological training institutes, and write books and teaching materials. This is good, but is it good enough? At the heart of spiritual leadership in the New Testament is not headknowledge or special abilities or even the wish to lead, but an innocent capacity to obey God. I believe it was my friend *Greg Groh* from "World Leadership Council", who said to me: *"I have only one problem with current christian leadership training. It does not train leaders."*

#### Training leaders, or raising sons?

As the ministries of Barnabas and Paul, then Paul and Timothy, or Elija and Elisha show, apostolic and prophetic ministries produce new people very much like fathers "give birth" to sons and daughters. Paul writes to Galatians: *"My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you. I am perplexed about you."* (Gal 4:19-20). He does not address them as students, his disciples or trainees, but as his children. This is probably one of the true hallmarks of New Testament and contemporary apostolic people: they are constantly in spiritual labor. It is unnatural for a man to give birth to children, since that is the gift of women. Still, people are born again by the spirit, and, I suggest, also born into ministry by the same spirit. As any Bible school dean will agree with me, the mechanical process of a student going through some teaching modules and experiencing a transfer of headknowledge will not yet produce strong leaders. There is much more to it, namely the fathering aspect of spiritual sons and daughters. The core issue is this: we may want to train many new leaders, but God the father wants us to simply raise spiritual sons. To raise a son is much more than to just teach him a few lessons or courses. As anyone with children will agree, there is no painfree parenting. It is utterly involving, frustrating and exhilarating at the same time, brings you to your knees or up the trees, makes you weep and laugh, and quite usually you end up perplexed, just like Paul, about your children and often enough about yourself. It is the most engaging task I know. This is the price we need to pay for the spiritual generations to come. Are we ready for this? Cheap training shortcuts, emergency crash-courses, relationally uninvolved seminars and purely academic efforts are as effective as quick-fix parenting and painfree bookwriting.

#### Churchplanting starts in the kids room

One of the qualifications of a biblical elder is that "he must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him with proper respect. If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church?" (1. Tim 3:4). This first litmus test of authenticity of someone's character and personality through his very own children is so ingenious and natural, that I sometimes jokingly remark that "churchplanting starts in the kids room". Healthy children do respect true authority, but naturally avoid empty authoritarian behavior and cold dictatorship without proper character. If ever a father makes the mistake of demanding and not

commanding obedience, he has lost his child right there. No amount of stubborn threat and punishment will earn back that lost trust, only true brokenness, humble tears and asking forgiveness from your own child will get you ahead.

I believe strongly that God can use young children for his purposes, because his Holy Spirit residing in such kids which are born again is not two, five or seven years old, but it is the age old Holy Spirit, capable of theoretically doing anything that a mature and old disciple can do in the power of the same Spirit. However, there is a difference. It has become fashionable to arrange short-term evangelistic ministry and summer outreach trips for young kids and unmarried adults, and the results of such trips for the kids are mostly positive. Most pastors I have asked do agree, however, that for the establishment of churches, evangelistic short-term ministries of young unmarried adults is rather limited. Although Jesus himself and people like Timothy were unmarried, God has so chosen to generally link the establishing of his church with the socially proven lives of fathers and mothers, qualifying in real life as capable fathers for their sons and daughters, and reflecting the loving and passionate heartbeat of the father in heaven.

#### Master and disciples, not teacher and students

The issue of raising a new generation of spiritual sons and daughters for bringing in God's harvest is about life transfer. Life was literally breathed and rubbed into others, it was caught over a period of time, not just taught. The biblical model of doing this was through the close and natural and even lifetime relationship between a master and his disciples, a father and his spiritual sons who imitate him naturally and unashamedly. A professor just brilliantly "teaching his students", but not being much involved in the lives of his students, is no match to the efficiency of a father and his spiritual sons. Masters and spiritual fathers do not just train their disciples in the technical sense, they give birth to them and raise them, and quite literally, like Jesus did with his disciples, inject their spirit into them and therefore reproduce themselves. I have had many fascinating professors and teachers, but to be honest, I usually do not remember a word they said - but I remember the way they were, and this is what stayed with me. As master and disciples share lives, not 45 minutes in a sterile classroom every week, they are able to love, show, coach, correct and encourage each other. They make themselves vulnerable to each other. This is what it takes to make disciples, and to make disciples is one of the core commands of Jesus. We cannot delegate this task to paper or a programme or do it by radio or from a pulpit or a directors chair. A programme can make a disciple as much as a machine can make a son. Discipleship is about people getting involved with each other. It is about masters and disciples, spiritual fathers and sons finding each other, and then involves a process of nurturing and release.

#### Sons without fathers

Sons and spiritual disciples don't really want to be part of your wonderful program, they want you! Have you ever wondered why it is that many of today's leaders of the

church are in their leadership position not *because* but *in-spite* of those who should be their spiritual fathers? Why is it that, unlike Jesus, many contemporary leaders not only have a history of breaking away from existing churches, denominations and organizations in order to live out their own calling, but have a sizable track record of spiritual sons turning away from them also, often bitterly disappointed themselves, to start "their own thing?" Does the considerable trauma which goes with having to break away in order to break out, affect - and in fact curse! - Christian ministry much more than we ever dared to think?

#### The way we inherit is as important as what we inherit

It is out of question that for the remaining task of discipling the 230+ nations of this world we will need scores of bold, radical, fearless and faithful leaders, young and old. By far the largest percentage of the older generation of Christians are in agony about "where are the young and able ones to step into our footsteps and carry on our life's work?" Could it be that this fear is related to the way the generations are currently relating to each other? Has a pattern emerged, woven through with habitual sin, which effectively makes the young and older leaders split from each other before they could become effective together? Or worse, has an unbroken curse been handed down through the generations leaving both generations trapped, hindering the effective "passing of the baton" from one generation to the other to see God's work on earth completed? Why is it that spiritual initiatives are still constantly being reinvented by the emerging generations, who feel they need to break away from their spiritual or physical father's beaten path and start all over again, rather than finishing an inherited course? I suspect that the way we inherit is as important as what we inherit. Many older leaders - just like some fathers - are so afraid to let other and younger leaders take over, that they literally release the steering wheel only as they drop dead. If we inherit over a dead body, or from somebody who only grudgingly or because of some serious sickness gives up control, it will be only a bitter-sweet experience. I have often wondered why Jesus could "retire" at an age of approximately 33, and not 65. Once His redeeming work on the cross was done, he could then go home because he had introduced and instated his disciples into the proper inheritance of the Father in heaven. I know that I am not much qualified to write this, since I often feel to be just a miserable father myself. But I am toying with the idea of retiring with 50, and dream of using all energy which God may leave me to invest into the up and coming generation and be available to as many as I can as one of their spiritual fathers.

#### Are we not radical enough?

One December evening in 1996 I sat together with *Rudi Pinke* of Christliches Zentrum Frankfurt. I admire Rudi, a former Journalist, since I feel he is one of those radical new church leaders, ready to go and do the unthinkable. I shared with him what I felt the Holy Spirit is doing around the world, about the reinvention of housechurches, multiplying cell churches, miracles, strategic alliances and all that.

Suddenly he looked at me and exclaimed: "*Wolfgang, we here are just not radical enough!*" Now if it would have been for many other pastors I know, I would have most likely politely smiled and thought to myself: "You do not know how right you are". But this was Rudi Pinke. And there in his office it struck me. To be radical is not the point. It is not nearly enough. And I was reminded of another incident that had happened recently.

"Be a father to him"

There he stood, one meter away from me, pale, stiff, and seemingly unable to move. I had just preached in this radical church in Germany, a typical mission-mobilization-type of a sermon, go see your nation disciplined, for God's sake think the unthinkable, do the undoable, raise the dead, and go plant 50.000 churches in Germany. The Pastor had made an altar call. For some reasons I never like altar calls, and usually try to escape somewhere to the side. But the young man had caught me even as I was hiding behind a pillar. He came close and stood in front of me. I remembered that he was a youth leader in the church, deeply committed, he knew his stuff, was respected, and, I am sure, was at that time included in many prayers of unmarried girls in the church. I did not know what to do, so I prayed whether God can give me a hint. "*Be a father to him*", I heard God's Spirit speak to me. So I hugged this young man, and prayed like a father would pray to bless a son. I was stunned with his reaction. He melted like an iceblock in my arms, cried streams of tears, and just soaked in whatever there was to be soaked in. Later, his mother joined us, and repented from the sin of having her own plans for her son, rather than letting God take charge of him. I will never forget that incident. We just stood there, he wept, she wept, I wept. And there something dawned to me for the first time.

Unbroken curse, not just a generational gap

At first, I was just wondering whether it is of any significance that the very last word of the Old Testament is "curse." Malachi 4:5-6 reads: "*Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the LORD. He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers; or else I will come and strike the land with a curse.*" What immediately follows is a history of rebels and political factions, war and tensions, a leaderless time which the Bible prefers to not even mention. Could it be, that the current unredeemed, unrestored relationships between fathers and children is not only just the old generational problem we all know, circling around issues like the contemporary fashions, the length of hair and the style of music, but the spiritual result of fathers withholding their hearts from their children? They do it usually by repeating an ungodly tradition, because their own fathers have done so, too. As a result, we might be very well handing down a curse through the generations, instead of releasing blessing.



### The tears that break the curse

Just imagine yourself, a spiritual son, resting at the heart of a spiritual father who is expressing his unconditional love for you, who tells you that you are the jewel of his life, someone to be very proud of, a dream come true, and who leaves this fond tear of fatherly love and affirmation on your cheek as you leave him. Or imagine yourself, a spiritual father, hugged by a son, physically warming your heart, who tells you how proud he is of you, how secure he is in your presence, who openly admires your wisdom, gives you his heart on a silver platter and says: "Tell me, how can I be like you, what shall I do with my life?" In that instant, something happens in both of them. A wholeness is restored to them which the devil wanted to rob all along. The father is enabled to stand up and be radical, forgetting what the others and the neighbors are going to think and say and boldly stand up for Kingdom values and visions - because something gives him almost unbearable strength and drive: a son believes in him and has given him his heart. In a similar fashion something makes click in the heart of the son, too. He will be endowed with a sense of utter security and purpose. He can boldly go through closed doors, raise the dead, do what no-one has ever dared to do before, because there is a father who loves him, believes in him, has said so and has proven it. In fact, in both of them a curse is broken, and a blessing is released.

### Pounding the door

I will never forget that incident which happened during a DAWN-conference in Nottingham in 1995. I was in a seminar on youth church planting. A young man in his early Twenties stood up and expressed his passion and concern for his generation, and related the story of how they had started a youth church. Suddenly he surprised everybody by taking up a chair, and started to pray, pounding the chair violently against the floor. The reaction of the spectators were different. Some were appalled by that obvious un-English and undisciplined behavior, "that chair might break!". Others were just puzzled. As I sat there, I felt God's spirit say to me: "*See, his is knocking at the door of the fathers heart with all his might. he had a lot of teachers, professors, directors, coaches, preachers, almost anything - except a spiritual father.*"

### A rebel is a radical without the father's heart

If fathers convert their hearts to their sons, and sons to their fathers - according to the biblical pattern it should start with the fathers! - a new and healthy framework is being created, within which true bold radical Christianity - and leadership! - can and will grow. If this does not happen, boldness will quickly turn into rebellion, and use it's strength to break and tear, rather than to build and complete. We have many radicals today, in both generations, most of them growing into rebels. A rebel is a radical without the father's - or a son's - heart. He is left with one of the deepest traumas anyone can have - he is lost in the generational stream without a secure anchor, and has become a spiritual orphan. When heaven opened at the time of the baptism of Jesus, most of us remember the dove. But there was this voice from heaven of a father who publicly declared: "*This is my beloved son, in whom I am well pleased!*" Could

it be that this was the real start and launching pad for the ministry of Jesus, the son and lover of his father, one who's greatest secret of strength was hidden in the statement: *"I and the father are one"*?

### Spiritual orphans

Whoever is launched into existence without been given a fathers heart may very well end up a spiritual orphan. A study done by Dr. Pierre Rentchnick in 1975 under the title *"Orphans rule the world"* has proven that many people who made their radical mark on history were in fact orphans. Nearly 300 of the worlds most influential politicians where orphans: Alexander the Great, Julius Caesar, Charles V and Louis XIV, George Washington and Napoleon, as well as Lenin, Hitler, Stalin and Castro. This is similarly true for religious leaders: Moses, Buddha, Confucius and Mohammed where all orphans. The trauma of growing up fatherless has bottled-up enormous energy which they used to prove themselves to the world, because they have never heard a loving father say "well done, son!", and rejoiced, relished and relaxed in that knowledge and security.

Many churches, denominations or organizations have unwillingly given birth to a wave of children who are spiritual orphans, fatherless leaders who had to break away in order to obey their life calling. Many in Europe exclaim: Two World Wars have killed our fathers, whole generations have been bombed away. When the wars started, *"all the daredevils went to the front and died. Who was clever enough to stay behind? The accountants. And today we inherited their genes and drown in a flood of bureaucracy!"*, says my friend *Bob Smart* of Reading, UK, with that dark and spot-on English humor. He meant it as a joke, but maybe there is more truth to it than meets the eye.

Spiritual fathering is also one of the greatest needs of today's "Generation X", many of them unable to believe in the consistent and unfailing love of the father in heaven because of their fathers on earth. They are over-entertained and underfathered, and, in fact, spiritual orphans.

### Turning the hearts in order to prepare people for Jesus

In Luke 1 there is a startling verse about John the Baptists: *"He will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous - to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."* In obvious fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecy of Malachi about the "second Elijah" his ministry is rolling out the red carpet for King Jesus. His own father Zechariah doubted: *"How can I be sure of this?"*, since he might have had other great plans for an eventual son. Zechariah and had to undergo a radical spiritual surgery before he was to be filled with the Spirit and join his own son in prophetic ministry (Lk. 1:76). The life-message of John the Baptist was *"repent!"*, turning the hearts of the fathers away from their sins and traditions and their eyes towards the coming son, Jesus: *"Look, the lamb of God. This is the one!"* (John 1).

The turning of the hearts to the father and his son is in obvious relationship *with "making ready a people prepared for the lord"*. John had a prophetic ministry: turning the hearts in order to make ready people for Jesus.

#### Releasing nations

*Brian Mills*, intercessory prayer leader in England and a dear fatherly friend, is one of those men and women who still can weep unashamedly and openly; one who loves children and therefore has more spiritual children than he and his wife probably know. As we discussed the issue I am discussing here he told me how England gave birth during her colonial period of the British Empire to some 44 nations. But instead of giving her heart to those children, Britain took what was most precious, their natural and human resources and the political fame of ruling those nations. Britain was robbing the children instead of fathering them, and now has a spiritual debt to repay to nations like India. India still celebrates its independence, but needs help to move on into liberty. As individual and spiritual fathers turn their hearts ongoingly to their children, denominations to their unwanted offspring, organizations to their breakaways, and colonializing nations to the emerging nations, not only in symbolic or fleeting acts of political diplomacy, it will cause a release because this will be breaking a curse.

#### Cheerlead healthy radicals

To disciple whole nations by spreading out housechurches into every corner until the country is full of them requires a special kind of faith, and is a radical thought for many. But yesterday's radicals are often today's trusted pillars of the church. If we want to see a multitude of Christians take up their calling and inheritance in the Kingdom of God and go and see whole nations, people groups, cities and regions discipled, we need to provide and prepare for them an atmosphere and an environment where they can be growing up healthily and without spiritual-orphan trauma. To be radical usually means to be ready to walk on thin ice, and even if no one respected is there to really believe in us, we would still do it. But I would like to call us all to a prophetic, concerted and systematic effort, if necessary, encouraging the remaining and emerging fathers among us to start this process, and give their hearts to the sons. That will allow "the sons" to also give their hearts to the fathers, in turn. This last prophecy of Malachi seems to me the most impossible and challenging thing of all, staunchly resisted by any devil on earth, since he knows and fears what would happen. We therefore need to call upon God and his Holy Spirit himself to come and melt the hearts, crack the walls, bridge the gaps, break the curse, apply the redemption Jesus has accomplished at the cross also in our lives and churches and organizations, and pray to God to light fires, throw bombs, thunder from heaven or do whatever it takes to make fathers and sons run into each others arms.

### Able to follow faceless leaders

Many Prophets say that the future leaders of the kingdom of God will have "no faces and no titles". They will be nobodies, anti-leaders, lacking that impressive title line on their visiting cards, will be frail and weak rather than powerful and overwhelming, will clearly not be a star. They prefer to rather be known as a father than a leader, and be in broken agony about the lost rather than boasting unashamedly about their latest "ministry victory", never stopping to brag about what God recently achieved through them and their great programmes. The new leaders will not be interested in control and power, actively ignorant of their public image, deaf to the cheerful lures of fleshly Christian fans wanting to elect their next King Saul, only to see them riding on a wave of human applause into spiritual oblivion, cashing in here on earth whatever awards God wanted to give them in heaven. But who listens to prophets. Had "good tradition" not stoned most of them?

### Three stages to become effective disciples

God's eyes are constantly searching for whom he can send. Once he finds somebody who is willing, he will guide him and gift him and bring him in relationships with the right people. I have observed these following three stages through which a person usually goes in order to become an effective disciple and then an effective discipler:

#### 1. *Spiritual spring-cleaning*

People are sinners and need to repent. Repent for each known sin and have a clean past. Most people have not only sinned but have been sinned against, through wrong and ill treatment, hate, anger, jealousy etc. Here you may need inner healing and counseling to "forgive those who have sinned against you, and bless those who have cursed you." Redeem your relationship with your father or children, as I have tried to explain above. Accept as God-given the fact how, when and where you have been born in the natural sense of the word. It is all in God's plan that you should be thick or thin, male or female, bright or not so bright, or from Hindu or Christian or Muslim background. Thank God in detail for all he has invested into you so far. As a clear result, you will be able to say with the Psalmist: "I am wonderfully made". Thank God for your natural and acquired gifts and abilities - he did not teach you to swim in order to let you drown. Be reasonable in the core disciplines of Christianity and display fruits of the Spirit in a Christian's life: prayer, joy, peace, patience etc. Once you have a redeemed past, you will start to have a redeeming future. You will not have to carry traumas, wounds, hurts and other spiritual mortgages into your ministry life and hurt others. I call this phase sometimes "spiritual spring-cleaning", the process of accepting and appropriating personally the salvation Jesus has given us, which cleanses us from sin and the consequences of sin as much as possible. It is just like in real life: as we have washed and brushed, put on a clean dress, we can go public.

## 2. *Discovering spiritual gifts - the tools of the trade*

Each Christian is given one or more spiritual gifts (1 Cor. 12-14; Romans 12) at the time when Jesus starts to live within the believer through the Holy Spirit (Romans 8). These gifts are supernatural empowerment from God, the tools of the trade for Christians, necessary to be a useful team member with a master builder. A certain number of Christians are then gifted and called in a special way and develop into one of the five equipping ministries mentioned in Eph. 4,11. They stop just having a gift, and start becoming one. There are three ways to discover spiritual gifts:

- a. *"You will know them by their fruits"*. In the context of ministry and Church life believers can help each other identify their area of spiritual giftedness by tasting and telling about each others fruits.
- b. *Spiritual gift analysis* through appropriate tools and tests like spiritual gift tests available in most nations.
- c. *Prophetic ministry*. Prophetic people often can "see" the area of peoples giftedness. After this, associate yourself with a person who is years and miles ahead within the very ministry area God has gifted you in initially. Carry his suitcases, learn from him, if possible live with this person, and rub off as much as you can, by asking questions after questions. Be his disciple.

## 3. *Apprenticeship: getting associated with masters in a specialized ministry and learn by doing.*

Be trained for a few days, months or years in relationship and with supervision of someone more experienced than you, preferably someone in the very area of your own ministry calling. In this way, prophets would train junior prophets, apostles junior apostles, mature evangelists junior evangelists and so on. The apprentices would carry suitcases of their masters, pour water over their hands, live with them, see how they function, and instead of idol-worshipping "a holy man" at a distance, get to know a person of God and learn from him in real life. Unapproachable giants in "a class of their own" and spiritual superstars have done more to prevent others discovering their own giftings and callings than many may realise. If you learn from a person who has the same gifting and a similar calling than yourself, your learning curve will be phenomenal, because you learn in the very area of your giftedness - which will be most exciting to you - and dictate the speed of learning also - your learning curve will be as steep as fast as you come up with really good questions.

This all should be carried out in the natural and healthy context of housechurches. Training should not necessarily be an "out-of-body experience". As housechurch-planting is establishing new groups of believers in homes and multiplying them, the best way to be trained to do that is to actually see it working firsthand, and "to get infected with the pattern", so we reproduce it wherever we go.

### Time and finances

Many ask the question when they should "come forward for ministry", as we say in Asia, and who will pay the bills. I want to be brief here, and say: you come, when you know you are called. And: what God orders he pays for.

Many are struggling with the whole educational system in a nation. It is often built towards preparing a person for a place in the economic work structure of the world, from which, in more than one ways, God wants to save us. One pastor recently said it like this: the most crucial years of each youth is, spent - or shall we say sacrificed? - on the altar of education, whereby the parents pour the fuel on the fire. As a result, many people would think of being disciplined in their late twenties, and then often think back of many 'lost years' earning degrees they never needed anyway." God is able to provide for those who serve him wholeheartedly. Those to whom you minister to will be empowered by God to empower you, also financially. One or two housechurches of 15 people each can easily finance one fulltime Christian in the West, and 5 to 10 housechurches can finance a fulltime prophet, evangelist, apostle or pastor in the rest of the world. You will experience the promise contained in Matthew 6:33 first-hand as you go in faith and make your first steps.

## 11. Models of Church Multiplication

*How to plant churches without manufacturing them*

If you want to multiply churches, stop "planting churches!"

Jesus never gave an expressive command to go and plant churches. Many churchplanting movements have struggled to show biblical evidence that the New Testament actually commands churchplanting, but in vain. The whole core of the message of Jesus revolves around three very basic commands: "*Repent for your sins. Love your neighbor. Go and make disciples*". This is our part. God's part is: "I will forgive; I will accept your neighbor also; I will build my church."

If we assume God's own part for ourselves, to build his church, we will, in a way, usurp a responsibility that we do not have, taking the reins out of God's hand and assume we can go and still build the "temple of God" any time of the day. This is not only a solemn action, but an usurpation of what is God's prerogative, an intrusion into an area of responsibility which God has kept for himself. If we do not stop at this yellow line, we may start manufacturing churches, creating assembly lines for them, franchising churches, experimenting with churches, building what looks like churches, but we might simply be like Saul starting to usurp a ministry which was not his, namely to sacrifice on the altar which only the prophet was supposed to do. But as we allow ourselves to become part of God's plan by accepting our very own responsibility to repent, love and disciple, he will use us accordingly in multiplying housechurches. If we do what we are supposed to do, God will do what He promised to do, and build His church. In this sense, true Church planting actually starts when we ourselves stop trying to manufacture them. Discipling is at the very core of God's message, and is a simple and effective way of multiplying ourselves. As we multiply ourselves, Jesus will be able to multiply churches, made up of multiplied disciples.

### Five organic stages

The Church should be where people are, in order to saturate (Matth. 13:33 Rom. 15 18-21) society with the glory of God. Each Church should therefore be "a shop-window of God," where people can see God and exclaim: "*see how they love each other*." This needs to happen repeatedly, locally, convincingly, in order to allow neighbors of the churches to become and remain disciples of Jesus Christ.

Most churches go through 5 organic stages in their developing process and lifespan, which can be compared with the development of a human being:

*1. Conception:* The spiritual seed of a new church is conceived by someone, either individual or corporate. The person(s) is (are) now "pregnant with an invisible church". It can be a direct Word of the Lord, a vision, a calling, a growing conviction, or just being part of a church planting movement.

2. *Pre-natal phase*: During this planning time, the church of the future is being discussed (who, where, when, how, why) and everything is prepared for the birth. This is a good time for inspired dreaming about the future just like parents do when they know they are pregnant.

3. *Delivery*: The time of actually planting the church, when it begins to function as an organic entity.

4. *Visible growth phase*: The church grows and matures by addition, and, as with any adult person, finally reaches the time where the growth reaches the maximum point of organic growth.

5. *Multiplication*: This is the time where the church multiplies itself, or, if it fails to do so during the appropriate time span, usually enters a spiritual menopause and ultimately starts to die. During the healthy multiplication process, the five-fold ministry develops, and starts to ensure quality development and ongoing multiplication.

### ***Practical models of Churchplanting***

Since there are many cultures, languages, ministries and different circumstances, there are probably countless ways to plant churches. Again, we should be creative, and not copy blindly other peoples models, looking for recipes for success, and failing to listen to God individually. That is also why God is choosing the apostolic and prophetic ministries to "lay the foundations", to do the founding and planting work, because of their inbuilt-ability to initiate, invent, be uniquely pro-active and prophetic.

However, I want to list some models which seem to repeat themselves around the globe as general or generic models of churchplanting. They can serve as initial guidelines and provide insight into some principles, but should not be taken as a blueprint for sure success. We always need to be aware of God's creativity and probably unique way of starting His church in a specific place and time:

#### **1. Planting House Churches**

The goal is to plant a multiplying house church movement in an area. A NT-model for this is Luke 10, where disciples go two by two and actually stay in the house of a "a man of peace", a person who not necessarily is a Christian but is ready to open his house and his family for the message and presence of ambassadors of the Prince of peace.

A typical process of planting a housechurch often has these seven steps:

- a. *Christians start sharing their own life* with it's inbuilt gospel message for a period of a few days or some weeks with a "man of peace," who could be a



Christian or a God-fearer. They literally live in with the family that has opened its door. Those not-yet-Christians can be ideally their hosts, or interested people after an event like a public or publicized healing or exorcism or a conversion, or seekers asking for a church to be established in their own home or the home of a neighbor or friend.

- b. *Model a housechurch* with them and for them, eating, praying, sharing together, teaching each other how to live according to the Word of God.
- c. *Establish local elders* right from week one by talentspotting the future elders and spending significant and special time discipling this person or persons. At this stage, not only can the gift of prophecy or spiritual discernment be very helpful, but we can simply observe to whom people "naturally" look for leadership.
- d. Insist on developing *local and not foreign patterns* of church.
- e. *Build organically* and ensure church multiplication as or before the housechurch reaches its organic optimum, the border line where it still is organic, but in the danger of becoming organized. This thinking needs to be built into the thinking of the new Christians from the beginning.
- f. *Establish a local model of celebration*, if possible, of a number of housechurches meeting together, or with other churches in the same area, linked through the existing or emerging fivefold ministries.
- g. See that *apostolic and prophetic ongoing mentoring* is ensured and the housechurch pattern is able to reproduce itself.

As I said before, many housechurches today have between 8-15 members, and typically multiply every 6 to 9 months. Many of them are fathered by an unpaid elder usually working together with other elders of other housechurches for contact, teaching and planning. Sizes and forms of house churches vary greatly. In former communist Bulgaria, some house churches have even met for actual celebrations in houses, gathering up to 250 people, entering a house two by two or alone over a period of 6 hours (coming) in order not to attract attention of neighbors, employing silent ways of meeting and teaching (no drums, no organs, guitars etc.) and leaving two by two again for the next 4-6 hours. In some housechurches in China, during such celebration-in-home-structure sometimes more than 1.000 people received baptism. Some house churches meet at the same home, or in different places during the week, typically 4-6 different places, in order not to attract too much attention and allow for a number of hosts to be involved. There are "house"-churches which meet at occasions in caves, or sometimes simply rent a bus to show a few visitors around and have a teach-in in the process, or meet in a different hotel room every now and then, under a tree, in an office at night times, in a restaurant family room, on a boat or ship, or any other places. But the main heartbeat of the housechurch happens in the very houses of the members.

## 2. The Family approach to Church Planting

This churchplanting method does not build on winning just individuals for Christ, but a whole family unit and seeks to start developing a new housechurch with a whole newly converted family, which then is linked together with other families into multiplying housechurches. This is geared to see household conversions occur as in the case of Cornelius (Acts 10) or Lydia (Acts 16), and then form housechurches in the homes of the converted family.

To illustrate this, I will introduce a three step model which was developed in a predominantly Muslim context, but should be considered as only one of many ways to do it.

- a. Pass out the word, that you are ready to pray free of charge in the name of Jesus for anyone with problems.
- b. If someone request your ministry, in a friendly way ask for two conditions to be met:
  - (1) I am ready to come only if the whole family is present, because I do not want to do anything behind your back and I do want you to feel safe on your own safe ground.
  - (2) If I come, I want you to give me permission to explain what I am going to do when I pray in the name of Jesus, so that you can be sure I am not practicing magic.

If invited, the Churchplanter can share the Gospel of the Kingdom with the whole family present. No one will interrupt, because they want him to pray. After his presentation of the Gospel, he may go and pray for the usually sick/demonized person. He prays aloud, and usually leaves after his prayer right away. If something happens and people are healed/delivered etc., it is much better to respect the dignity of the family and let them process what they have heard and seen in the privacy of their own home. Otherwise they could feel "a religious defeat" in the presence of someone from another faith.

- c. If the family has decided after a period of processing what they have heard and seen, that they want to know more about Christ, they usually ask the Churchplanter to come again. This time, he again has one condition: the whole family should be present, like last time. If they agree, he goes with the firm intention to call the whole family to faith in Christ, to lead them into a family-based conversion process and to start a church with them that very day.

## 3. Radio Church Planting

The strategy is to use the existing media of radio in an apostolic way to plant churches. Rather than evangelizing the many in order to get the response of the few, and build them up into follow-up programmes, this strategy is geared in building a movement, which is specially suitable for geographically

widespread nations, or where there is a severe limitation on Christians meeting together.

It could happen in 4 phases, similar to a model practiced by *FEBC* in China or *IBRA Radio* in the Middle East:

*Phase 1:* This phase usually already exists. It is the traditional evangelistic radio program usually producing the SRC, the Single Radio-Christian, who has decided to follow Christ through the messages he heard in the radio, but, as in the case of the estimated 3-5 million SRC's in the Middle East, may never see another Christian in his lifespan, miss out on the community and fellowship aspect of Christianity, and often remains lonely, weak, and sad. Traditional follow-up patterns like Bible correspondence courses do not change the SRC-pattern very significantly, and have only a very limited potential to reach the millions of listeners.

*Phase 2:* An additional programme like "How to be a better Christian", "How to interpret dreams," "How to rear Children" etc. is introduced by the radiostation, geared at breaking the individual listening patterns. The SRCs are to invite trusted friends or neighbors and listen to this programmes *together*, with an emphasis on group discussions and studies etc.

*Phase 3:* A next step is the introduction of the "radio church", the "Church in your house" or any other programme with a culturally appropriate title like "God in the house". It's intention is to coach people into becoming a church. Usually this programme consists of a taped housechurch meeting in the local language and manners of the target group, where the listeners are encouraged to meet and participate according to the housechurch pattern which is broadcasted. The radio takes the place of the apostle or elder for a while. After modeling the housechurch pattern itself, the participants can be trained and taught how to plant and form housechurches by a short teaching programme on the same radiostation. This could happen 30 minutes or 1 hour after the radio-housechurch meeting was broadcast, so there is time for a corporate meal, as a part of the housechurch experience. After some weeks or months those who want to continue the new housechurch pattern they have observed, practiced and been taught, constitute themselves as a new "radio church". They then write to the radio station, who in turn informs a local housechurch-network in the area concerned to follow-up and incorporate the new church into their network.

*Phase 4,* connect the emerging housechurches with an existing network of churches in their areas to ensure their proper care and further apostolic oversight. FEBC has seen thousands of churches planted that way, and runs even a programme called "*China Dawn*" with the goal to plant 1 Million new housechurches.

#### 4. Partnership between Crusade Evangelism and church planting

One of the biggest losses in the concept "Crusade evangelism plus follow up plus integration into local churches" is during step 2 (follow-up) and 3, the integration into local churches. Research shows that on average only 1 percent of so-called "new converts", those who have actually prayed to "receive Christ" at a rally, will actually become members of local churches and cross step 2 and 3. The rest are not only lost, but often even vaccinated against the gospel, because they say with all seriousness "I have tried it, and it did not work". Realistically, rally-evangelism will not cease to happen in the foreseeable future, and so we need to look for ways in which this can contribute to churchplanting. Two things are required: 1. an openness and willingness of the evangelist and his team to actually serve and help the local church leadership and their vision in their long-term work to multiply churches; and 2. a readiness to combine the evangelistic ministry with local apostolic ministries and develop local patterns of churchplanting.

As a result, instead of trying to incorporate seekers into existing churches, a process that will lose most seekers in the process, the goal is to plant new housechurches during the evangelistic event itself.

- a. Local or, if necessary, imported apostolic ministries will train existing Christians locally to start housechurches several months before the actual rally.
- b. Up to 10 seekers can be directed at the rally itself to register their names with a local housechurch elder of his area (village, region, PIN-Code area etc), who will then invite the seekers within 24-48 hours for a first housechurch meeting in the very neighborhood of those seekers, either in the home of one of the seekers, or in the house of the housechurch elder. From there it is the responsibility of the housechurch leaders to develop this initial meeting into housechurches. This should by no means be a follow-up meeting, but the real thing, the housechurch itself. A religious follow-up meeting is much less attractive than a housemeeting with a meal; seekers are looking for spiritual parenting more than for bible-teaching; they need to be taught how to live naturally in a Christian pattern more than how to learn the doctrines of a particular church just yet.

If this is done strategically, out of 10.000 seekers in a large rally, where with the traditional follow-up and incorporation strategy usually about 100 will end up incorporated into churches, and 9.900 others who will not (a retention rate of 1 percent), the retention rate, those seekers incorporated into housechurches, will be typically much higher. Some experiences are indicating that retention rates of 10 or even 15 % will be possible, in some extraordinary circumstances even up to 25-30 percent. The fact is, however, that the existing model of Evangelism-cum-follow-up is so deeply rooted in our thinking and evangelistic tradition, that there are painfully few Evangelists today who see the connection between churchplanting and Evangelism, and, given the constant stream of new invitations for them to preach, very few are even considering a change in their model.

A similar approach of housechurch-planting through proclamation-type Evangelism can be used for showings of the *Jesus-film*. Instead of linking this evangelistic tool with the traditional follow-up cum-incorporation strategy, that same day or evening of the screening new churches can be formed with the new seekers. A churchplanting team of a local or nearby church can accompany the film team and stays back after the show for 2-3 weeks to model housechurches and celebrations, praying to detect and train future elders etc. In many countries where the Jesus film is shown, between 20% and 50% of those who have seen the film actually indicated they would like to follow Christ. This would be a permanent opportunity to start church movements amongst this high number of seekers in close cooperation with the film teams.

#### 5. Planting churches by envisioning others

Planting churches is a work of the Holy Spirit. Some people, especially apostolic and prophetic people, are uniquely gifted for this and can simply catalyze and enhance the work of the Holy Spirit through other individuals, by inspiring and releasing a vision and new action in people. Such people "make others spiritually pregnant," as *David Yonggi Cho* once put it, and new churches can be planted by inspiring and envisioning others to do so. There are many undiscovered, uninspired and therefore spiritually unemployed churchplanters in the world. They need to be strategically recruited to do so, usually following a three-part strategy; a. seek and find those who have a church planting potential; b. nurture them; c. release them.

#### 6. Church Planting in cooperation with the working of the Holy Spirit

This strategy works through prophetically alerting and mobilizing the churches and movements of God in a given area to be open to respond and cooperate quickly to a special work of the Holy Spirit, "following up" one of his sovereign acts of grace. It follows the patterns of

- a. Asking God to extend his hand to do mighty things in the name of Jesus (Acts 4:28-32), or recognizing that he has already done so,
- b. and getting the churches ready to respond quickly to an "open door" and a "white harvest field" by planting multitudes of churches quickly through reorganizing resources and people.

Examples of this are supernaturally prepared or revival situations, national or local crises leading to a new spiritual and unusual hunger amongst people, well known power encounters, healings and exorcisms, or a significant number of people with visions and dreams and other supernatural experiences which beg for an explanation. Amongst the Turkic Muslims in Southern Bulgaria in the early 1990s a number of churches sprang up amongst former Muslims due to many and unusual healings and exorcisms; however, many more churches could have been planted during that period, but not many were ready or flexible enough for this window of opportunity.

## 12. Building national Momentum

*How to develop a critical mass, and leave the outcome to God*

*As we lost our goal,  
we doubled our speed.*  
Mark Twain

Church history has seen many movements without real momentum; what we really need is momentum, and the movement, I am sure, will follow. A big avalanche starts with a small snowball starting to roll. Then it picks up speed, incorporates more snow and other materials, and builds up momentum, reaches a critical mass, and becomes unstoppable. Webster's dictionary defines momentum as "*a quantity expressing the motion of a body or system, equal of the product of the mass of a body and its speed.*"

The housechurch has a very revolutionary and flexible ability to contain and build momentum. It has a huge potential for multiplication, it is flexible, and it can adapt very fast to a changing situation. But the main reason why I prefer housechurches to build up momentum rather than a movement is this: with momentum built up, *only God truly controls the outcome*. Should God wish to see 80% or 90% of the population of this world saved and incorporated in the church, a movement, no matter how visionary and daring it is, will most probably simply not have room to accommodate for the sheer magnitude of this type of vision at the present time. I am quite comfortable with the thought that God can very well accommodate this type of vision; and as we do our business of repenting, loving our neighbors and making disciples, he will do his business and build His church.

That does not mean we should not work towards goals. Goals are manifestations of our vision, statements of faith, they express today what we believe about tomorrow, and they release motivation and focus energy. Goals have an important mobilizing effect and can solve problems which emerge by only staring at the Status Quo. Some of the most beautiful developments take place when the body of Christ in a region or nation adopts a collective goal, a corporate mission statement what the Christians intend to do together about the future.

### A small boy with a bow and arrow

Imagine a small boy who shoots at a barn door with his bow and arrow. After he shoots, he goes to the door, draws a target around the arrow with a piece of chalk he takes from his pocket. He then takes a few steps back, puts his hands proudly on his hips and says "Bullseye, right in the middle!" This behavior is good for a small boy, but not for the church. Hebr 11:1 speaks of a future-oriented faith, a "certainty of what we do not see".

### Who really rules nations?

In many nations which are caught up between political and religious ideologies, personality cults, moral decay, growing organized crime, ecological and economic developments which seem to have run out of control, one question appears on more and more peoples' lips: who really run nations? And in this regard, an age-old prophecy comes back to many as critically important: *"Ask of me, and I will make the nations your inheritance, the ends of the earth your possession. Therefore, you kings, be wise, and be warned: serve the Lord with fear and rejoice with trembling, kiss the Son."* (Ps 2). The Lord Jesus Christ is the one of which this prophecy speaks; he is the very one who said "go and make disciples of all nations." Only a master of nations can speak this type of language unashamed. Many heads of states, presidents, chancellors, dictators, kings and generals as well as their staff know deep inside themselves, like Pilate of old, that they have no real power "if it were not given to them from above" (John 19:11).

Since the days of Moses and Aaron, God has raised prophets in every generation, to speak into the very lives and circumstances of nations. Even today God raises people like *Paul Cain* (USA), *Bernard Ancoma* (UK), *Jeremy Sunderraj* (India) or *Erich Reber* (Switzerland), who already have or will speak regularly into the lives of Presidents and other heads of states on God's behalf.

In the very near future many national governments will have to make a tremendous choice, as Jesus fulfils his promise: *"The meek shall inherit the earth."* This God-given inheritance begins with prayer, is received in prayer, and ends with prayer. And only the meek are meek enough to truly believe that; that is why they will experience it.

### Discipling nations

It is part of the God-given task of the local church to "disciple the nations". Many of us are familiar with discipling one or two people; but how do you disciple a village, a street, a city, a region, a people group, a nation?

How did Jesus disciple people? He invited everyone, and chose some to be his special apostles. Then he shared his life with them, literally showed them how to live, how to die, and how to do the "works of God". The result was a mixed people movement, some followed him, some rejected him, *and all knew about him*.

A disciple of Jesus is following his master in community with other disciples. Jesus never identified himself fully with any one Christian, but he identifies himself with "the church", his body on earth. An individual Christian is not yet "the full gospel"; the local church is. The individual Christian "knows in part", is a member but not a representation of the full body. An individual Christian may act on behalf of Jesus as an "ambassador of Christ" in a special mission or task. But every believer is ultimately "dead to himself and lives in Christ." The new life in the spirit is corporate, not individual. God has taken us away from us. This is important, because it means that the place to disciple people is the local church. This also has an important

consequence: they way to disciple the nations is through multiplying churches until we have enough of them. No evangelism nor Bible study or discipleship programme, no matter how excellent and sound, will ever achieve what only the local body of believers can do: to disciple each other and their neighborhood in real life, teach each other how to live in spirit and truth, change each other's values and life-styles, offer accountability, correction, love, grace and forgiveness, and to be an ongoing mutual encouragement to each other. Only this will make Jesus transparent to each other and the world around us, so that people will not only hear and read about, but truly "see and understand" the Gospel, so that all know and see what there is to know and see about Jesus.

#### A church in walking distance of every person

For each human being to "see and understand" (Rom 15:21) the Gospel of the Kingdom, expressed through the local Body of Christ, there needs to be a vibrant fellowship - a shopping window of God - in walking distance of every person in each nation. The yeast of the Kingdom must work "all through the dough" (Mt 13:33). No person should be out of earshot of the life of the local church, there should be no "neutral territory" where people simply do not know about Christ. The church needs to be God's outpost on earth, and needs to be found in every village, community, kraal, neighborhood, barrio, high-rise building and apartment block of a given nation. These churches need not to be perfect, nor will they ever be; but they need to strive as much as they can to be of New Testament quality and caliber, so they will not only fill, but truly "disciple" a nation. If we need to work at the quality of our churches, then this is the place to begin. And if we find out we do not have enough churches within our nation, then we have to plant whatever number is necessary. In short: we need the right quality of churches in the right structures in sufficient quantity in all the right places. Most populations of nations multiply because families as their basic unit multiply. As long as the Church relies on methods and strategies leading to addition and not multiplication, the great commission of discipling whole nations will simply never be accomplished.

#### Objectives before methods

Since *David Barrett* published his booklet on 700 global plans to evangelize the world, there are even more plans and initiatives out there which ultimately want to see one methodology or the other reach global proportions.

Every Christian, says Pastor *Bill Hybels* of Willowcreek Community Church, Chicago, should answer three basic questions: What, Why, and How. 1. What do you ultimately want to achieve (and how do you measure it)? 2. Why do you want to achieve this goal and not another?; and 3. How do you intend to achieve your goal?, which speaks of means and methods, the way things are done. The problem is, he says, that many Christians start the wrong way round, with the methods first. Then they find some reasons for keeping up doing what they are doing, and often enough do not end up getting done what they originally wanted to achieve. The methods have



become the goals, and are now an end in themselves. We all stand in the danger of falling in love with methods and we start to believe that "the evangelization of the world" has to do with spreading this or another method across the globe. This is far from the truth.

#### Wanted: the whole soup

One of the excellent slogans of the evangelical "Lausanne Movement for World Evangelization" is for *"the whole church to take the whole gospel into the whole world"*. The church itself, as we have seen in church history, has been the biggest part of the problem. As God is making the church "whole" again by allowing it to return to its relational, organic and truly holistic life, a missing piece is restored to the equation: the wholesome nature of the church. In many nations Christians know that "it seems as if God is up to something; a "new apostolic reformation," as C.Peter Wagner calls it in his book "Churchquake". I will illustrate it in a picture: it is as if God is bringing about a new wholeness of the original church, with all necessary elements and ingredients, according to an apostolic and prophetic pattern. If it were a soup which God is brewing, he would be adding spice by spice, ingredient after ingredient, patiently waiting for the whole meal to be balanced and cooked to perfection, and then go and feed the world. Many of us humans may not have his heavenly patience, and stand close by the pot, excitedly snatching away a pinch of salt and this or the other ingredient, translate it into a new ministry sensation or spiritual wave, create ministries and organizations around each ingredient and cover the globe with them. We overlook that one part is not the whole piece, the ingredient is not the soup, and the effects of even a right and vital ingredient alone will not satisfy for long. In other words: Let God finish cooking his soup! My suggestion is this: God seems to be rebuilding the quality of church first, and if that quality reaches its right proportions, it will find and develop its own structures everywhere and spread itself globally, propelled by God's means, infecting everything it touches like a heavenly virus, transforming society and all people groups with its God given spiritual DNA according to the law of the critical mass.

#### Discipling, not filling

Being brought up in the German world where there are areas and places today with 20.000 or more people without a single evangelical church, I felt I entered pure heaven when I arrived in Florida, USA, for the first time. In a superficial research I once did in Sarasota, Florida, I found out to my astonishment that there is about one evangelical church for every 650 inhabitants of that town, about 30 times the saturation level of some areas in Europe. However, and I hope my American friends will forgive me for saying so, in everyday life I had to reluctantly admit that I did not feel much difference between the two worlds. *"Some contend that many nations are evangelized - yet they remain significantly undisciplined," says James Engel. "A power-driven, top-down style leadership built large churches but tragically fell short*

*in discipling people. As one Christian leader in central Africa said: 'The missionaries brought us salvation but never taught us how to live.'*"

Discipling speaks about introducing a new quality of life first, and then address the issue of quantity. Christians in a number of nations have told me something of the extend: "If the quality of the present day church in its garden variety form does not change drastically, we might very well fill our whole country with churches of the prevailing kind, but will we then truly disciple it? We think not."

*Jim Montgomery* of "Dawn Ministries" contends we need to work towards the goal of having a church for every 500 to 1.000 inhabitants in each given nation. However, this calculation is based on a typical traditional church with an average of between 50 to 100 people. Each person, sociologists say, can effectively influence only a limited number of other people with his ideas and values. As there will be many more housechurches in the future in each nation, two things might happen: the average church will become smaller and sociologically reach fewer people, compared to the traditional "small church" of 50 or 100 attenders. At the same time, it will become more powerful in its witness, because it again regains it's organic dimension, is placed in real life, and develops a huge multiplication potential. I still believe therefore, that it is a good strategy for the Body of Christ in any given nation, region or city to work towards an initial goal of seeing one church for every 500 to 1.000 people planted. Because this process will be geared at reaching a certain kind of saturation level - where a natural limit is reached - this type of process is called saturation church planting - planting as many churches as are needed to fill the land with the presence of God.

Saturation church planting, if it is carried by a significant minority or even the majority of evangelical churches in a nation, creates several important dynamics: it creates a goal-oriented unity based on strategic vision; it reduces competition, and it focuses all our energy towards a common direction.

I have found it helpful to use some graphic illustrations for these dynamics:

#### How to eat an elephant

The missionary task which Jesus left us is an undertaking of mammoth proportions - as large as an elephant. It's size alone is sometimes depressing and laming. In Africa, there is a proverb for such cases: "*How do you eat an elephant? Simple: cut it into small pieces!*"

Applied to our situation: the incredible responsibility and task of saturating nations with the gospel must be distributed equally on many shoulders all over the world. Each person works in their locality doing what only they can do towards the common aim. The individual pieces (sharing the work) are ideally just the right size that they can be achieved in a given time span; the pieces are neither so large that they destroy or discourage us, nor so small that someone starts to believe that he can do it all alone. This process reminds us of what Nehemiah did in envisioning the people of

God to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem together. After envisioning them, he distributed the work towards a common goal, and gave each family a piece of work cut out for them. As a result, they were not just piling up an ungainly heap of rocks, but were truly building a wall.

#### The rabbit hunt

In a traditional rabbit hunt, hunters hunt a rabbit with dogs. Before the hunt begins, the hunters wait at the starting point with their dogs. It is interesting to look at these dogs more closely. Before the race starts, they are all nervous, bark, bite each other, mark some territories, and generally make a din. That all changes, the moment the horn sounds, and the rabbit is released. In an instant, these dogs are transformed. They suddenly have a powerful common goal: get the rabbit! Shoulder to shoulder they chase the rabbit until they catch it. If a dog is more interested in biting other dogs, marking trees or just barking, it does so on its own decision. It opts out of the chase, because it has other priorities.

A rather rough interpretation of this comes from South Africa: Today, many evangelistic and missionary projects and many of our groups, movements, churches and fellowships can be compared to those dogs in this picture, often enough as they are before the start! What they truly need is a 'rabbit', a common, concrete aim for working together; a goal which is large enough to challenge each of the participants thoroughly and to motivate them to join in a common strategic process with a clear focus. Or, as Paul puts it: "If the trumpet does not sound a clear call, who will get ready for battle?" (1 Cor 14:8)

#### The competing ants

Picture two ants standing in front of an elephant. Both argue, which of them will eat the elephant.

The average evangelical church today has around 100 members. Given certain sociological factors, a local church has an evangelistic potential of typically a factor 10, that is, it can effectively touch the lives of about ten times as many people as they have active members. A church of 100, then, can "reach" around 1,000 people in their basic cultural, ethnic and social layer of the society with the gospel. That means that in a city of 15,000 inhabitants, we need realistically about 15 churches - one for each 1,000 inhabitants. That does not mean each church will have to grow to 1,000 members, it means that each church has a task - the piece of an elephant - of reaching the lives of 1,000 people. Many churches are able to speak of competition, when a second active church is founded in a small town with 15,000 inhabitants. Not only both these churches are necessary, but another 13 are probably needed in excess of the existing number, to reach a total of 15. In other words: there is no need to fight which ant eats the elephant. The only solution is to call for more ants. If the magnitude of the goal is realistically clear to all churches in an area, competition is reduced, and former competitors can become colleagues and then, hopefully, friends.

### *PIPS*

Where to start and how to arrive at such a nationwide process? Jim Montgomery has written two books on this very subject, so I feel I can very very brief in this regard here. For the purposes of this book, I only want to highlight four strategic keys, *people, information, prayer, and strategy*.

### *People first*

"God's method is a man." Like *John Knox* of old in Scotland, who *prayed "God give me Scotland or I die"*, there are men and women of God who, more than others, know and carry a special agony and burden, a true pain for their nation, city, region or people group. Often they are apostolic or prophetic people, carrying a heavy load on their shoulder which others rarely understand. They are often tearful and rather broken; in essence they are modern apostolic fathers and mothers, pregnant with God's dreams, ready to give birth to a nationwide vision. Often you will find them ready to carry the last responsibility, go any distance, sell their house, car and spiritual birthright, do anything, walk on water and go through fire, if necessary, to see their nation saved. Historic movements of God never started with committees. They always started with visionary individuals. That is why such people need to come first in priority. They are the ones anointed for leadership and servanthood, and around them a national movement can emerge.

### *Information*

"The truth shall set you free." The devil likes the Christian endeavor to be clouded in a mist of confusion, where we do not realize whether we march backwards or forwards, where we do not know our status quo nor the direction where we go from here. That is why we need information. The way to get that information is twofold: we pray, and we ask questions. Prayer will reveal things supernaturally, which God wants us to know; to systematically ask questions is what we call research today. Like Joshua and Caleb, as they spied out the promised land, we need Spirit-directed research on the "harvest force" (the church) and the "harvest field" (the world), pray about the mismatch between the task of seeing a church in walking distance of every individual and the situation today; we need to observe the signs of the time; we need to read and interpret the newspapers, statistics, trend analysis and whatever helps us to understand the nature and magnitude of the unfinished task in a nation. Since we cannot really love what we do not know well, knowing our country better allows us to love it better. And love is one of the strongest motivators on earth. If someone, for example, can read that his own country, district or city really needs 10.000 more churches; and that if the present day church continues the way it does things today, it will not change the spiritual state of the nation significantly in the next 200 years; and then puts down that research result to continue reading his newspaper without been deeply stirred and becoming restless, then this person might have singled out himself from the spiritual leadership of a process to change his own country for the time being. He might change his mind later, but those with a passion, on whom God has

placed a true spiritual calling and a responsibility will react different to figures and facts, because they know these numbers represent a profound challenge: real people with real names, faces, addresses, pains and problems, and with an eternal soul at stake, should the church continue it's trot. And such motivation will mobilize the right people to mobilize others.

### *Prayer*

When a man kneels, God deals. Prayer pleads with God for a nation, and fuels vision and passion. Prayer moves mountains, raises the dead, heals the sick, restores the wounded, blesses those who curse, asks forgiveness for sins and therefore heals the land, and touches the fathers heart. Our strengths sometimes separate us; but prayer humbles us all again, and therefore it unites us. Prayer is not only a means "to do better spiritual work", it is spiritual work itself.

Since prayer is essentially communication with God, and good communication is two-way communication, prayer also involves God speaking back to us in one way or other. As we pray for the very discipling of nations through the mass multiplication of the presence of Christ in housechurches, alone and together, in small groups or triplets, that wonderful prayer strategy invented by *Brian Mills*, or as a housechurch, in traditional churches or in "houses of prayer for all nations", places of permanent 24-hour prayer initiated by people like my friends and spiritual colleagues *Amaury Braga* from Brazil or *Raju Abraham* in India; as we pray in our huts and homes, cars and buses, celebrations and networks about finishing the overriding task God has given to all of us, God starts speaking to us, usually alerting the prophets amongst us first (Am 3:7-8), uniting the church through spiritual vision, combining the fivefold ministries in strategic synergy, prompting us to see in His word revelations which we overlooked for far too long, awakening more and more people in the night to intercede, giving dreams and visions, and ultimately pour out His Holy Spirit on all flesh to shake us all awake to the redemptive purposes of God in our time.

This type of prayer goes far beyond the "God-my-name-is-Jimmy, gimme-gimme-gimme" type prayers, which my friend *Dr. Victor Choudhrie* calls 'goat-prayers', because from the distance you only hear the real key word sounding like 'meee, meee, meee'. It pleads with God about the very destiny of nations. And the very people who start to pray these kind of prayers, will be drawn irresistibly into becoming part of the solution to their own prayers. Jesus told his disciples to "ask the Lord of the harvest to fling out workers into His harvest" - and the next moment they find themselves part of those who went out themselves.

### *Strategy*

Strategy is how we use our limited resources towards a specific goal in the most economic and efficient manner. Strategy focuses energy. As good stewards of God's talents, we will need to work intentionally; unlike in giving gifts, the right hand does need to know what the left hand is doing. For national momentum to emerge and

grow, we need to search and find those called and gifted by God for that very purpose; we will recognize them at their special spiritual burden; then we need to find and release God's prayer leaders to initiate and develop prayer momentum, start a process of research and prayerful analysis to get our facts right. As we pray about this, God may then choose to speak to us about "the specific way forward". As this "prophetic message", a spiritual battle cry that immediately resounds in the hearts of other Christians, is picked up in the housechurches through conferences, celebrations or from house to house by word of mouth, God's people will be mobilized towards a common goal and objective. Then they will need a strategic framework for their activities, very much like a river needs a valley or a dam guiding the flood into the right direction. Within this strategic framework, the apostolic and prophetic ministries will be able to function freely, and the churches in each locality, city, region or nation will be able to move as one. *"Find purpose, the means will follow"*, says a billboard across my street in Madras. As the Body of Christ in a nation finds its redemptive purpose, the means - spiritual generals, equippers, housechurch elders, money, plans, methods etc. - will follow.

### The carpet

God does not require any of us to understand all this in full. In fact, it might be dangerous and corrupting to know and understand too much. It is simply those who trust God for the ultimate oversight and control in this supernatural partnership between God and humans called housechurch-planting, who will be able to trust Him also for the very next step. Then we can joyfully do our piece of work, let Him link it with the rest of the picture, carry our cross and otherwise leave the fame and glory to be His'. Maybe God is weaving a carpet, where thread comes together with other threads, until it forms the final product. Wouldn't it be worth a few surprised shouts when we realize that, as we were linking up with people and movements on earth, and doing things which made sometimes no sense whatsoever from a purely human perspective, that God was, in fact, creating a carpet and letting us only see the "wrong side" of it. Then, at one time in history, He will turn that carpet around for everyone to see - and we will be stunned by the genius design. And we might be even more stunned, when we realize, that all of this is part of that red carpet, welcoming back Jesus Christ the Messiah to the earth He created, and take back what is rightfully His. What bigger joy for anyone of us, then, to have Him come past our group, our town, our city, our country, stop for a moment, smile at us and say: *"well done, you faithful servants!"*

### Suggested Materials

#### General

Donald McGavran, *Founders of the Indian Church*, CGAI, POB 512, 13/2 Aravamathan Garden Street, Egmore, Chennai 600 008, India

Christian A. Schwarz, *Natural Church Growth*, Diedersbüllerstr. 6, 25924 Emmelsbüll, Germany. Fax (+49)-4665-252

Watchman Nee, *The Orthodoxy of the Church*. The Gospel Book Room, T.C. 2/1444, Pattom, Trivandrum 4, Kerala, India

Barney Coombs, *Apostles Today*, Sovereign World Ltd., PO Box 77, Tonbridge, Kent TN11 9XT, England

Kari Törmä, *Whole Marriage Ministry*, Keinutie 8.i.54, 00940 Helsinki, Finland.  
Email: kari.trorma@ymca.inet.fi

Roger Ellis & Chris Seaton, *New Celts*, Kingsway Publications, Eastbourne, PO Box 827, BN21 3YJ, England

Larry Crabb, *Connecting*, Word Publishing, Nashville, USA

#### *Literature on House Church*

Bob Fitts, *The Church in The House*, 5851 Kuakini Hwy. #107, Kaulua-Kona, HI 96740 USA Fax (+1)-808-334-9673 Email BobFitts@compuserve.com

Dr. Met Castillo, *The Church in Thy House*, Alliance Publishers, 13 West Capitol Drive, Pasig, Metro Manila, Philippines

#### *Material on and from DAWN*

Dawn Fridayfax; Great stories about the Great Commission, weekly 1-page up-to-date information written by Wolfgang Simson about what God is doing around the world, available on subscription base through fax, mail and email.

Contact by mail to: Focusuisse, Tannenstr. 3, 8200 Schaffhausen, Switzerland. Fax in Europe to (+41)-52-6201606, FAX in the USA to (+1)-(312)-453-0683, or email Fridayfax, at 100337.2106@compuserve.com

Jim Montgomery, *DAWN 2000: 7 Million Churches to Go*

Jim Montgomery, *Then the End Will Come*, Sequel to "Dawn 2000"

Roy Wingerd, *DAWN Research Handbook*

Brian Mills, *Developing a Prayer Strategy*

Cathy Schaller, *Dawn Intercession Handbook*

all available through Dawn Ministries, 5775 N. Union Blvd., Colorado Springs, CO 85918, USA, Fax (+1)-719-548-7475, Tel. 719-548-7460

*Literature on Cell Church*

Ralph W. Neighbour, Jr., *Where Do We Go From Here?* Touch Publications, Inc., PO Box 19888, Houston, TX 77224, USA

Larry Kreider, *House to House*, House to House Publications, 1924 West Main Street, Ephrata, PA 17522, USA

William A. Beckham, *The Second Reformation*, Touch Publications, PO Box 19888, Houston, TX 77224, USA

*Church Growth and the home Cell system*; Church Growth International, Yoido PO Box 7, Seoul 150-600, Korea

Howard Astin, *Body and Cell, Making the transition to Cell Church a first-hand account*, Monarch books, Broadway House, The Broadway, Crowborough, East Sussex TB6 1HQ, England

Larry Stockstill, *The Cell Church*, Regal, USA

*About the author*

Wolfgang Simson functions as a strategy consultant, researcher and journalist within the Dawn International Network (see below). After working as a social worker and Taxidriver in Stuttgart, Germany, he later studied Theology and Missions in Switzerland, Belgium and the USA, and did extensive travelling to research growing churches and churchplanting movements. He is a board member of both the British and the German Church Growth Associations, and editor of the *Dawn Fridayfax*. Wolfgang Simson is of Hungarian, German and Jewish descent, and is married to Mercy (Indian). They have three sons, and currently live in Madras, South India.



### *Dawn International Network*

The Dawn International Network is a *vision- and friendship-based global strategy network*, not a headquartered organization with members or staff. The goal is to facilitate, be available to and cheerlead national and regional movements for saturation church planting led by those individuals, groups or movements God calls and gifts from within each nation or people group or area for that express purpose.

1. The network welcomes those people, movements, organizations, churches and denominations to participate *as long as they share a vision and a practical conviction for saturation churchplanting*, and appreciates and blends itself with other and similar networks, like the World Evangelical Fellowship, AD2000, the Lausanne Movement and others.
2. Within the network participants are encouraged *to relate to each other as friends, not just formal colleagues*. The core vision is to see the Kingdom of God to be extended through the multiplication of New Testament churches leading to the "discipling of nations" (Mt 28:18-20), not individual or organizational or denominational goals reached. There is no membership, rather a dynamic link system, within which every group or person defines the amount and quality of relationship or input he or she wants to give or receive.
3. *Every participant brings a certain core competence to bear upon the task of saturation church planting on a national or regional scale*. This can be moral support, research, writing, intercessory, financial or administrative abilities, or any one of the five-fold ministries. Everyone is therefore encouraged to function within his or her God-given gifting and specialty to blend into an informal strategic partnership towards the spiritual transformation of a nation.

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In aligning itself to the religious patterns of the day, the historic Orthodox Church after Constantine in the 4th century AD adopted a religious system which was in essence Old Testament, complete with priests, altar, a Christian temple (cathedral), frankincense and a Jewish, synagogue-style worship pattern. The Roman Catholic Church went on to canonize the system. Luther did reform the content of the gospel, but left the outer forms of "church" remarkably untouched; the Free-Churches freed the system from the State, the Baptists then baptized it, the Quakers dry-cleaned it, the Salvation Army put it into a uniform, the Pentecostals anointed it and the Charismatics renewed it, but until today nobody has really changed the superstructure. It is about time to do just that.

*Imagine a young boy, unwrapping a new puzzle and immediately trying to put together the pieces. He pulls out a piece of cardboard from the puzzle box, depicting a red race car (he loves red race cars!). All excited about this new toy, he tries to assemble the pieces according to the red race car blue print. But somehow or other the pieces do not seem to fit as they should. He manages to bend them and tear off an edge here and there in order to make them fit with a little "convincing force", but something seems to be very wrong. Finally his father comes to his rescue. Dad immediately spots the problem, takes the beautiful cardboard with the red race car on it - and turns it around. And lo and behold, on the "other" side is a beautiful tree, the "original". The red race car was only the advertisement for another puzzle of the company! The boy sighed with relief, and tried to put together the pieces according to the new original - and within minutes he was done. What was wrong before? He had all the right pieces, but the wrong original. He had unquestionable and honest motives - but quite simply the wrong blue print!*

*Did the same thing happen to the Church?*

In this book, written from a global perspective, **Wolfgang Simson** describes what may be for many a radical new vision of Church – although many will quickly realize that this not more than a simple return to an age old biblical revelation: Christianity is not a series of meetings in church-houses, but a prophetic way of live, in house-churches. These housechurches do not only change the way Christianity is seen and experienced in the streets of the world, but allow the church to develop the "City Church", the coming together of the Body of Christ of a City or region, speaking with one voice and acting as one organism under only one head.