



## Better than the Hippies

A new look at the House Church Movement of the future

By Wolfgang Simson



Tribalism, argues “Herald Tribune” writer Jonathan Power, is both the glue and gunpowder of Africa. Tribalism – that self-imposed division of the black African population into roughly 800 tribes and their territories – is as old as Africa itself. Tribalism has served as a means of clan-based security and identity – *us* versus *them* – but more often than not, it has been the dynamite blowing apart the life’s of weaker tribes at the hands of stronger ones. In an age were political and trade unions are being pursued everywhere, anyone familiar with Africa has asked himself: why can’t the black tribes unite?! Why have their tribes, for ages, been fighting each other, pursuing age-old vendettas? And why have the founding stories of the various tribes almost always been fuelling hatred, mistrust and discord towards other tribes? The story of “Christian” Hutus and Tutsis killing each other in Rwanda a short while ago by the millions was, for many, simply another blip on the radar of a long history of violent, irreconcilable tribal clashes. It is clear that the “Christianity” claimed by both Hutus and Tutsis simply cannot be the Christianity that Jesus Christ had in mind when he started his Kingdom movement. Historically, only three things have ever been able to draw together the black populations in Africa in a significant way and enabled them to function as a trans-tribal entity for some time: 1) Larger-than-life leaders like the ferocious Zulu-king Chaka Zulu; 2) an overwhelming enemy from outside; 3) political ideologies like communism.

Why am I writing about this? Because historically, Christianity and its 40,000 denominations – plus the myriads of Christian folks that believe they are independent even of the independents - has been split and re-split into “spiritual tribes”, celebrating the legacy of a human founder, the chief of a spiritual chieftom, his strengths blunted and weaknesses magnified through the ages. Classical Christianity, seen from a distance, is today not much more than tiny fragments of a whole mirror originally intended to reflect the overwhelming beauty of Jesus Christ. No wonder is a fractured society in general, the fiercely competitive and “branded” secular world plus everyone still steeped into tribalism little impressed by what they see in today’s Church. And so Christianity-as-we-know-it has only seen peaks and extraordinary times either under a strong king-like leader, a spiritual version of King Chaka Zulu, or in the face of an outside threat like disaster, war or persecution, or when Christianity was co-opted and made to back up and sanction political ideologies of any kind. But each of these historic peaks was short-lived: once one of the factors (human kings, outside danger, ideologies and the political opportunists that come with it) was gone, the movement usually went flat.



However, I have good news. I have excellent reasons to believe that Jesus is in the process of orchestrating a master stroke of genius in our days to achieve the seemingly impossible: the emergence of the smashingly attractive bride of Christ in a way that will stun not only her lover, but all those who look on. This is a time were a Kingdom movement is born that will ultimately achieve the purposes for which it has been called into being in the first place. But before we get to this, lets look at one more historical development that contains an interesting and maybe even sobering message to us today. Do you remember the hippie subculture? Originally a youth movement that began in the US during the early 1960s and spread around the world? Free speech, flower-power, make love not war? It was characterized by folks that roamed the world in VW-Buses and pursued a nomadic lifestyle, believing the pseudo-gospel of the day that freedom is the absence of restriction, that freedom is the power to do what you want, with whom you want, if you want. Those who were young, had a loud mouth and could take to the streets during the late 60s cried out against an entire selfish and seemingly pointless way of life – and then selfishly spent the bulk of their time to basically celebrate themselves. But what was their alternative? The whole world quickly knew what the countercultural movement was against

– but what were they standing up for? Many hippies, if they were not on the road, created their own communes or communities, hangouts, and the basic activity there was, statistically, drugs, sex and rock and roll.

At its core the Hippy-culture was a rebellion against suburbia: the lame, predictable, trapped civic existence of a post World-War generation that had taken down bad guys like Stalin, Hitler and Mussolini and now had no other vision than to have a good time. Work and earn, pay taxes and burn. In those days Mom and Dad were obsessed with getting a job, or better two, work hard, buy a box of a house, get a car, watch TV, plant raspberries and go – sorry, drive! - to attend a church service on Sundays.

Their kids did not buy it. They saw behind the façade. Such a life had no appeal; for them, it was a sham of an existence, plastic, stencilled, prescribed, something to flee from, not something to pursue. In our language today: suburbia was “The Matrix”. Youngsters fled such homes in order to find out who they really were; they ran away from such a senseless, consumer-driven circle, seeking real meaning, value, a real life. But once the selfish and rebellious orgies of drugs, sex and rock and roll had worn off, what was there to do? Where was the bigger vision, were did all of this lead?

The hippie movement branched into three smaller hippie-rivers: 1) the **hobos and free-riders** that jumped on the hippie-train because finally something was going on, and it allowed them to have a good time. At their core they were consumers – they consumed even each other. At the end, when all the hippie-hype was vented, most of them slowly and unobtrusively trailed back into the pack, into mainstream-society, and have been happily consuming ever since, having melted back into oblivion. 2) Then there were the **hard-core ideologists**, some of them so taken with their anger at the *machine*, the *system*, that they went so far as to become terrorists. Finally 3) the **reformers**, who intentionally invaded and infiltrated the system, becoming part of it and planning to change it from inside, even if it took decades. That long-term political perspective, which in Germany was called “marching through the institutions” later embraced almost any idea or ideology that promised change - or at least a cause - be it leftist, green, feminism, love parading, anything.

Do you see the parallels to a large segment of today’s Christianity? Since the late 90s in the Western context, house churches or organic churches are becoming a more and more frequent phenomenon. Thousands of house churches are forming inside and outside traditional church systems of all kind. Many are wonderful expressions of a passionate and missionary mind, bringing the church to the people, living a “shopping window of God in walking distance of their neighbours”. But, I’ am afraid to say, some groups awfully remind me of the situation in tribalistic Africa: there is a grave danger that house churches become small spiritual tribes, independent or even antagonistic of other tribes, where the age-old denominationalism and fragmentation is reappearing in ever new forms. Only a strong human leader (a spiritual king), a threat from outside (like the persecution in North-Korea or the burst of civil war in Kenya) or the spiritual ideologies of the day seem to be able to bring about a significant level of unity or even the ability to be heard or felt in society. Many house churches are not much more than spiritual DIY-groups with an invisible flag about themselves saying “us four no more” or became religious self-help groups that cater to their own insatiable religious needs: “lets study the book of revelation for the next five years”. However, consumerism (“I want a church that is good for *me!*”), fear & anger-based rebels (“I am hurt by the bad bad system, so I will criticize it!”) and idol worshipping ideologists will not solve the problem; *they are the problem*.

So how can we expect a movement that simply becomes “better than the hippies”, more united than tribalistic Africa, and more powerful, prophetic and therefore significant to an ailing society than a few thousand “spiritual VW-Busses” (organic, mobile communities) of modern religious hippies having a good time?

The answer is actually quite simple: **Kingdomization**. If democratization is the transition to a more democratic regime, kingdomization is the transition towards a monarchy. At least in theory many Christians know that Jesus is a King, even a “King of kings” and “Lord of lords”. Technically, that makes him an emperor. All the signs of the times indicate one thing: Jesus, the King of his Kingdom, is preparing his Bride for his return. In order for this to happen, Jesus has to do some intense housecleaning. Centuries of ill management, defunct teaching and blatant religious consumerism has created self-serving systems to cater for the spiritual needs of its members while they basically pursue a Babylonian concept of life: work and earn, pay taxes and burn! Gods word speaks of house churches

– we built church-houses. The King speaks of wishing to own us – we discuss whether to satisfy him with a tithe, be it gross or net; God speaks of apostolic and prophetic foundations, and we basically build on anything else. Little wonder that the house of God pretty much looks like the picture of this “impossible house”.



If the core of the problem is a lack of respect for an acting king and his decrees – the talk of a king that exists but does not govern, the solution is a return to his rulership. A king who does not rule is like a genius conductor of an orchestra that ignores him and his notes and plays free jazz, blues, Mozart and German march music, all at the same time.

This is why probably the strongest frequency of the Holy Spirit speaking today to anyone that has ears to listen is clearly this: “Return, you people who say you are following Jesus, to your King and his Kingdom. You, yes you? Seek first his Kingdom and the upholding of his constitution. Become a loyal law-abiding citizen in Christ’s Kingdom. A good bond slave of Christ. End your years of rebellion, your anti-machine mindset, stop being little more than a spiritual hippie, a consuming religious hobo, an opportunist waiting for the newest fad. Go and be properly naturalized in Christ’s Kingdom; go back to legitimate forms of Kingdom life in the area of sex, money, power and church. Rediscover the original genius blueprint for the ekklesia as an expression of the Kingdom of God, that realm of Gods uncontested rule.”

This ekklesia, as the New Testament clearly describes, is either an expression, an extension of the Kingdom of God, or it is not the Church of Jesus Christ any longer, but mutated into the Church of Man, a mere Frankenstein-version of the original Bride. Such a church will become a death-trap for Gods callings and gifts, a graveyard of dreams, a dead-end road towards discipling our nations. But here is our chance: if we recommit, alone and in droves, to the voluntary rule of our loving King who has given himself for us – no expenses spared! -, we will join the biggest movement of the Holy Spirit in our days. It is about rediscovering the nature of the Kingdom of Christ, and with it the unbelievable liberation to discover that true freedom is not the ability to do as we want, but to do as we should, in the service of our King.

Globally, many are rediscovering that the Church the King desires for and blesses always was and is what it always has been: a kingdom-shaped ekklesia, not a market shaped ekklesia; an ekklesia that expresses itself both in the small - kingdom families, house churches and flat-structured house church networks - and in the large - kingdom celebrations, City churches, stadium-filling regional meetings in apostolic unity. It is the expression of a lifestyle of kingdom people – life 2.0 - that inspires and infects all the five significant areas of society: family, education, culture, business and politics. And to make it even more interesting, many are rediscovering what I call “Kingdom Economics” – the long-forgotten, financial principles of the Kingdom that govern work and money in the Kingdom.

My theses is this: if we return to Jesus not only as our saviour but as our acting King; if we therefore accept and respect his royal design for his ekklesia, it will be re-founded on apostolic and prophetic foundations. And as form follows function, it will then, and then only, become that “missional movement” that so many are calling for, an apostolic architecture. And if we go another step forward and discard any self-serving, Mammon-breathed economic systems “made in Babylon” that we have tried so very hard to run our churches, businesses and ministries on, we might be well on our way to come to the climax of our Christian calling here on earth: to truly reflect and legitimately represent the glory of the triune God to a fragmented and shattered world in supernatural unity, and make disciples of all people groups. This will happen not under the enslaving fist of some religious dictator, out of anger and bitterness at the system, not because of outside pressure or our desire to ride and consume the latest wave, but in the embrace of that heavenly dancer who passionately loves his Bride.