
a brief introduction to the
House-Church
movement



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OUTLINE

The Present

- *HC Movements around the Globe*
- *HC Movement in North America*
- *What is a House Church?*
- *How are HC's different than Cell Groups?*
- *Why are People Getting Involved in HC's?*
- *Challenges facing the North American HC Movement?*

The Past

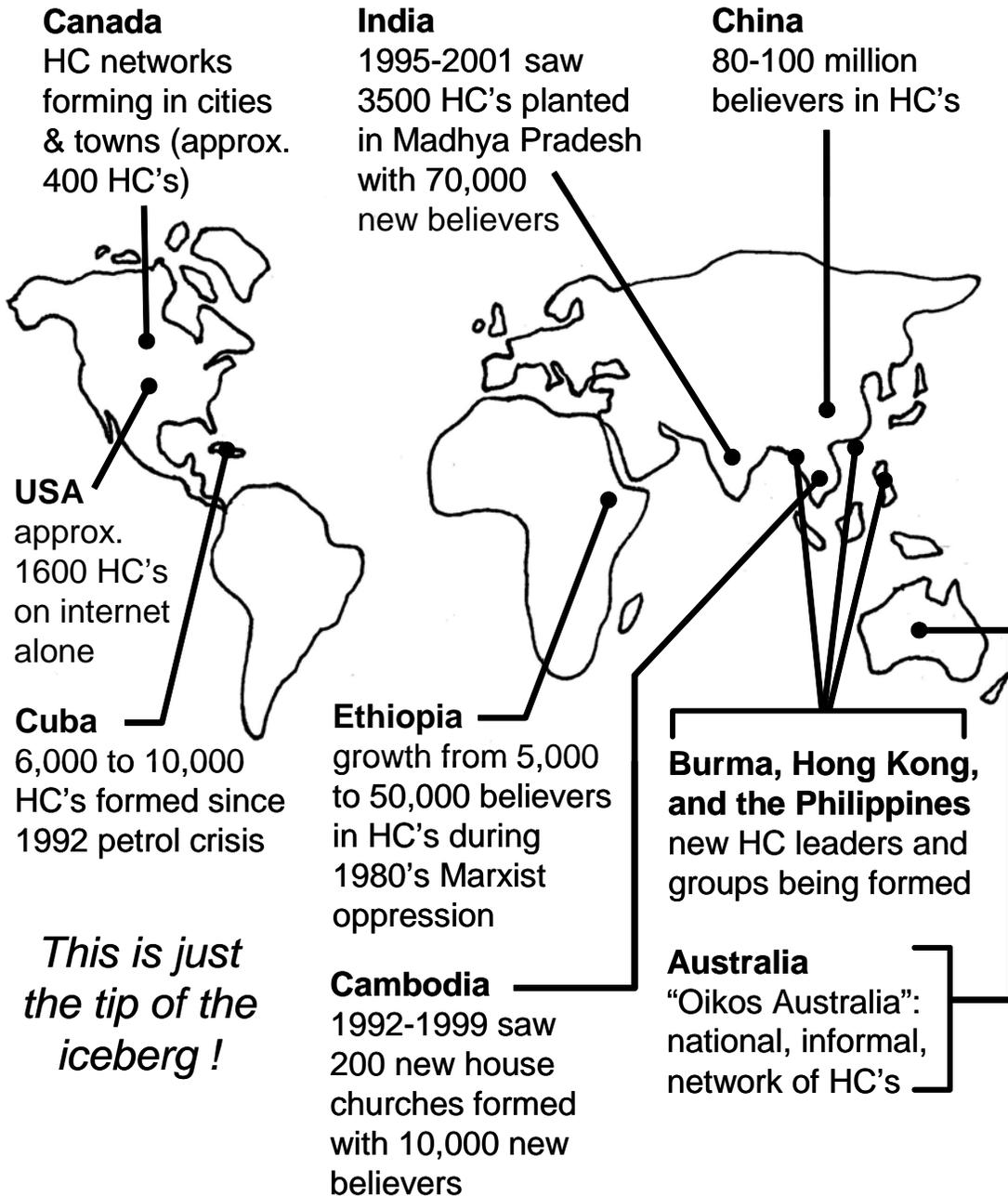
- *The Early Church – Is the HC Biblical?*
- *The Fall and Rise of the Church*
- *House-Church Movements in History*

The Future

- *Lessons*

Recommended Resources

House-Church Movements around the Globe



ETHIOPIA (1980's)



History

- 1950's - first Pentecostal missionaries
- 1974 - Marxist government installed
- 1980 - some evangelical church buildings closed down
- 1982 - government outlaws Kristos Church
- all church buildings

confiscated, Christian leaders jailed

- 1982-1990 - Kristos church goes "underground" into house churches / cell groups
- 1991 - Marxist government overthrown, Kristos church spreads & grows from 5,000 to 50,000 people

Characteristics

- house groups of 5-7 people
- prayer, singing, Bible study, discussion, Lord's supper
- traveling worship leaders going from group to group
- organized into house groups based on geography
- men and women in leadership
- evangelism especially at funerals and weddings

INDIA (1990's)



Madhya Pradesh

- In 1995, Victor and Bindu Choudhrie begin an experiment in church planting in the Indian state of Madhya Pradesh
- no buildings, no Sunday morning services, no professional clergy
- deploy young men with basic

training from low caste as church planters

- 3500 house-churches by 2001, with 70,000 people
- Strategy – plant a house-church in every one of 17,000 villages in Madhya Pradesh

Uttar Pradesh

- In 2001, 1250 new house-churches formed and 6000 new believers willing to be trained
- young believers go door-to-door and offer prayer
- healings and demonic deliverance are common
- converted families host “houses of prayer” that become multiplying house-churches

CUBA (1990's)



Thanks Castro !

History

- 1992 petrol crisis led to traffic standstill
- Protestant church re-organized congregations into neighbourhood house groups
- by year 2000, emergence of 6,000 to 10,000 house-churches

Characteristics

- house-church within walking distance of nearly every Cuban
- 1 house-church for every 1,500 people
- part-time preachers/teachers traveling from group to group
- Critique of the Cuban house-churches ...
 - very traditional services and meetings
 - very traditional mindset re: clergy and leadership
 - would construct buildings if they had opportunity

House-Church Movement in North America

In addition to many independent HC networks, the following groups are sponsoring the HC movement in a North American context ...

Denominations

- The Canadian Evangelical Christian Churches
 - Waterloo (Ontario)
- Dove Christian Fellowship
 - cell group and HC focus internationally
- The Free Methodist Church in Canada
 - HC projects in BC, Alberta, and Ontario
- The Foursquare Gospel Church of Canada
 - National director for cell and HC's
- Partners in Harvest
 - Barrie (Ontario)
- The Presbyterian Church in Canada
 - Cariboo (BC)
- The Southern Baptist Convention
 - "Church Planting Movements" internationally
 - HC networks in Dallas area and Colorado
- The Vineyard
 - Cincinnati (Ohio)



***First Canadian House Church Roundtable 2002
(Sponsor: Evangelical Fellowship of Canada)***

Mission Agencies

- DAWN (Discipling a Whole Nation)
 - HC coaching network - vision for 4 million HC's
- The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada
 - National HC database and regional facilitators
- The Navigators of Canada
 - network of Canadian/US house churches
- YWAM (Youth with a Mission)
 - international HC ministry of Robert Fitts, Sr.

What is a House Church?

House churches are fully functioning, self-governing churches, in and of themselves.

They desire to get back to the Bible basics of church life and mission.



They are free to eat the Lord's supper, baptize new believers, marry, bury, exercise church discipline, and chart their own course.

They are volunteer led and meet in homes in small groups for participatory and interactive prayer and worship, Bible study and discussion, mentoring and outreach, and the use of all spiritual gifts.

They are *not* event oriented, building centered, or clergy led.

They are part of a movement of grassroots Christianity that is spreading all around the world!

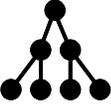
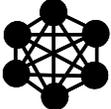
How are House Churches different than Cell Groups?

Cell Groups	House Churches
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PHILOSOPHY of MINISTRY

Operating Principle	Scripture is “descriptive” for church forms	Scripture is “prescriptive” for church forms
Practical Application	“Retrofit” or “add on” to otherwise traditional church structure	“Restoration” of apostolic patterns for church life and mission

EXTERNAL ASPECTS

Operating Principle	A segment of the church (“church <u>O</u> F small groups”)	Full-fledged church in itself (“church <u>I</u> S small groups”)
Practical Application	Pyramid Structure of Cells 	Peer Network of HC's 

INTERNAL ASPECTS

Operating Principle	Accountable and Dependent	Self-governing and Self-sustaining
Practical Application	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Big decisions (e.g. church discipline) by board/pastor - Format/Content approved by board/pastor 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Internal decision making - Participatory meetings involving all spiritual gifts

Why are people getting involved in the House Church Movement?

- **Called by God:** personal calling and sending by the Holy Spirit (Acts 13:1-3)
- **Restoration:** getting back to the New Testament apostolic “blueprint” for “function” and “form” in the Church

- **Participatory Meetings:** “each one” contributes to the “spiritual potluck” (1 Cor 14:26, Col 3:16, Eph 5:19-20, Heb 10:25)



- **Community:** build relationships and “one anothering”
- **Discipleship:** maturing new believers
- **Evangelism:** neighbourhood or “oikos” outreach
- **Multiplication:** new leaders and new churches
- **Stewardship:** funneling money toward mission and poverty, rather than buildings and staff
- **Personal:** preference or need for small group settings
- **Other?**

Challenges facing the North American House Church Movement?



- **Legitimacy:** misperceptions about HC's among more established churches and the broader community
- **Links to Larger Body:** what is HC's relationship to other parts of the Church? Work inside or outside established denominations?
- **Funding:** for 5-Fold Circuit Riders to travel to existing HC's and to start new HC's
- **Networks:** seeing HC's form cohesive, healthy, long-term links with one another
- **Mission:** having healthy focus on church growth, evangelism, and practical community service
- **“Fuzzy” Factors:**
 - pride
 - anger/hurt
 - personality cults
 - heresy
 - “catch the next new wave”

The Early Church of the New Testament



Common Homes
homes and house-sized churches

Common Meetings

Spirit-led, open, and participatory gatherings

Common Leaders

Local leaders

- elder = presbyter = bishop = overseer = pastor = shepherd
- local house-church leadership, long-term, teams, co-equal
- unpaid volunteers

Traveling Leaders

- apostles
- start new house-churches, lay foundations, temporary role, work in teams, move around from place to place
- financially supported when needed

The Early Church - Common Homes

“The churches of Asia greet you. Aquila and Prisca greet you heartily in the Lord, with the church that is in their house.”

1 Cor 16:19

“Greet Prisca and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, who for my life risked their own necks, to whom not only do I give thanks, but also the churches of the Gentiles; also greet the church that is in their house.” **Romans 16:3-5**

“Greet the brethren who are in Laodicea and also Nympha and the church that is in her house.”

Colossians 4:15

“Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother, to Philemon our beloved brother and fellow worker and to Apphia our sister and to Archippus our fellow soldier and to the church in your house.” **Philemon 1:1-2**



“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.”

2 John 1:10

“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 2:46**

* Does meeting in the temple contradict “house-to-house” patterns? What did they do when they visited the temple? Transitional time from Judaism to Christianity?

The Early Church - Common Meetings

“What shall we say, brothers? When you come together, **everyone** has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. All of these things must be done for the strengthening of the church.” **1 Cor 14:26**

“But to **each one** is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. For to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit ... to another the word of knowledge ... to another faith ... to another gifts of healing ... to another effecting of miracles ... to another prophecy ... to another distinguishing of spirits ... to another various kinds of tongues ... to another interpretation of tongues”.



1 Cor 12:7-10

“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish **one another** with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.”

Colossians 3:16

“Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage **one another**, and all the more as you see the day approaching.” **Hebrews 10:25**

The Early Church - Common Leaders

“And from Miletus [**the apostle Paul**] sent to Ephesus and called to him the **elders** of the church ... he said to them... ‘I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable and **teaching you publicly and from house to house** ... be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock among which the Holy Spirit has made you **overseers** to **shepherd** the church ... **I coveted no one’s silver or gold or clothes ... these hands ministered to my own needs** and to the men who were with me. In everything I showed you that by working hard in this manner you must help the weak.’”

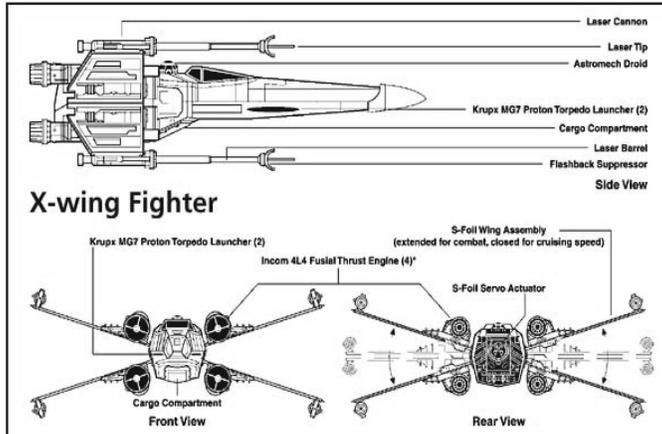


Acts 20:17,20,28,33-35

(see Matthew 23:6-11, Acts 14:23, 15:2,4,6,22, 20:17-38; 1 Cor 9:1-5; Eph 4:11; Philip 1:1; 1 Tim 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9; Heb 13:17; James 5:14; 1 Pet 5:1-3)

The Early Church - The Apostolic Blueprint

Now I praise you because you remember me in everything,
and hold firmly to the ***traditions***, just as I delivered
them to you. **1 Cor 11:2**



So then, brethren,
stand firm and hold to
the ***traditions*** which
you were taught,
whether by word of
mouth or by letter
from us.

2 Thes 2:15

[Timothy] will remind
you of my ways which are in Christ, just as I teach
everywhere in every church.

1 Cor 4:17

But if one is inclined to be contentious, we have ***no other practice***, nor have the churches of God.

1 Cor 11:16

Did the word of God originate with you? Or are you the only
people it has reached? If anybody thinks he is a prophet or
spiritually gifted, let him acknowledge that what I am writing to
you is ***the Lord's command***. If he ignores this, he himself will
be ignored.

1 Cor 14:36-38

Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or
seen in me—***put into practice***. And the God of peace will be
with you. **Philip 4:9**

The Fall of the Church



Apostle Paul's Warnings (c.55 AD)

Nicolaitans - Rev 2:6,15 (90's) - clergy system

Ignatius of Antioch (100) - clergy system

Gnostics (150) - flesh/spirit dualism

**Roman Emperor Constantine's
"Cathedral Christianity" (300's)**

holy men, holy buildings, holy
rituals, holy days, holy
fees, and holy empire

**Roman Papacy
Established (450)**

- Special clergy clothing (500)
- Image & relic worship (786)
- Holy water (850)
- Dead saints canonized (995)
- Celibacy of priesthood (1079)
- Religious Crusades & Persecution of "Heretics" (1000-1600)
- Purgatory taught (1439)
- Church Tradition & the Bible equal in authority (1545)

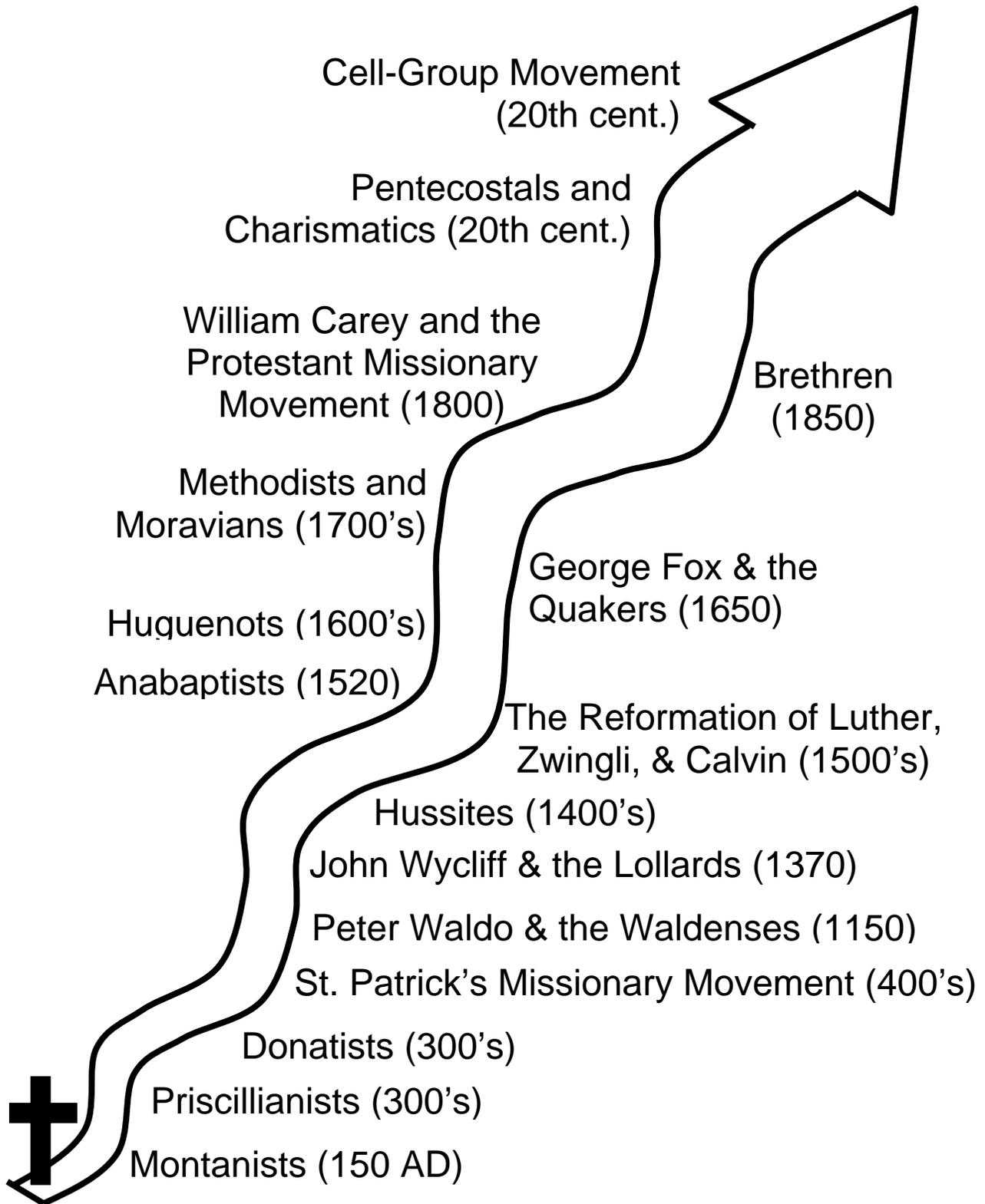
Reformers (1500's)

Luther & Zwingli
persecute "fanatic"
Christians and
Anabaptists

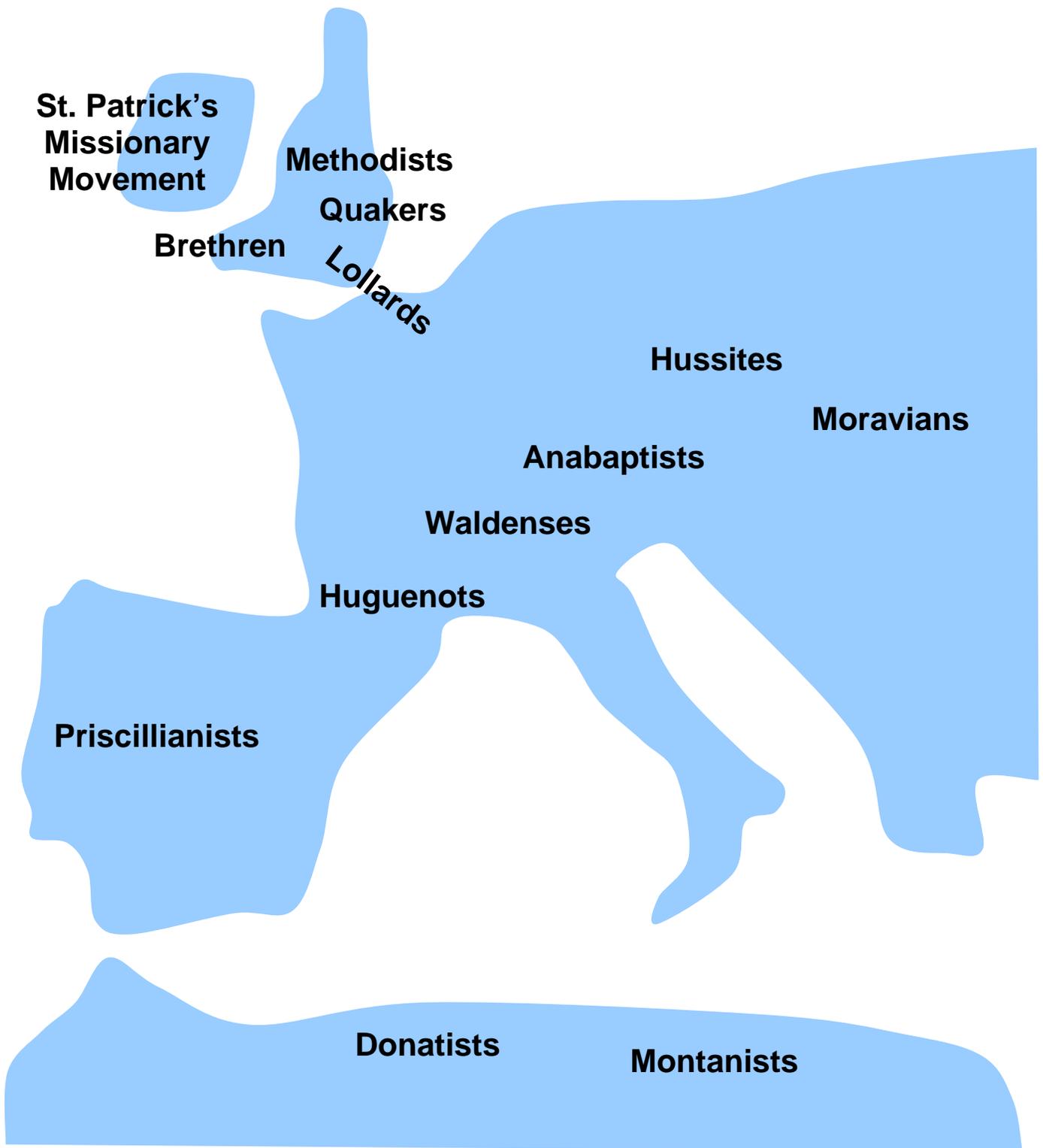
Evangelical/Charismatic Church (2000)

- Left-over practices/structures from Constantine's "Cathedral Church" System
- Egos and Logos - big business, marketing, bigger is better, denominationalism, etc.

The Rise of the Church



House-Church Movements in History !



Priscillian (340-385 A.D.)



History

- Spanish nobleman, wealthy, educated, charismatic
 - converted as adult
 - diligent Bible student, ascetic life
 - began to preach and teach
 - became a Bishop, but opposed by some Spanish clergy
 - Emperor had Priscillian and 6 friends beheaded in France
- movement spread to Spain, Portugal, and France
 - 200 years before movement totally suppressed by state-church

Characteristics

- lay movement, little distinction between clergy and laity
- “brotherhoods” = Bible reading sessions
- met in private homes
- both men and women participated
- only converted and baptized believers could participate
- joined by many bishops, priests, and the educated

George Fox and the Quakers (1650)



History

- late teens and early 20's traveling England searching for personal enlightenment
- Pendle Hill vision of masses of people who would respond to his message
- 2x2 traveling preaching teams
- 20,000 converts in 5 years
- persecuted by state & by both Roman Catholic and Protestant churches

Characteristics

- called themselves "Friends", nicknamed "Quakers" by critics
- referred to their mission as "The Lamb's War"
- serious devotion to Biblical authority in personal and church life
- open and participatory meetings
- inner light within everyone
- complete pacifism, no swearing oaths, prison reform
- equality between sexes
- opposed Catholic and Protestant "steeple houses" and clergy
- open air preaching and meeting in homes

John Wesley and the Methodists (1750)



History

- Anglican priest
- “holy club” at Oxford for prayer, Bible study, accountability, communion, & outreach
- failed missionary to American Indians in Georgia
- “heart strangely warmed”
- outdoor preaching begins
- “Great Awakening” in U.S./Britain
- 100,000 Methodists by Wesley’s death in 1791

Characteristics

- renewal movement within Anglican church, but spilled over
- lay leadership involving men and women
- “classes” and “bands” of 6-12 people = cell groups meeting in neighbourhood homes of members
- “circuit riders” traveled from town-to-town to evangelize in open air and teach believers
- 10,000 home cell groups by Wesley’s death in 1791
- social concern for poor, imprisoned, and sick

Pros

- lay involvement, massive growth, added to Great Awakening

Cons

- Unbiblical pyramid leadership structure
- House groups were overly programmed and pre-planned
- House groups *not* considered self-governing “house-churches”
- Wesley hesitant to allow movement to go beyond Anglicanism

Lessons for the Future

Early Church Example

- “Living-room Revolution” for the first 300 years
- No “holy” buildings, rituals, or clergy required
- Biblical “house-churches”, *not* just “home cell groups”

Exponential Growth

- Multiplication of simple house-churches
- Get small to grow big

Efficiency

- Think “simple, cheap, adaptable”

Equal Opportunity

- “Open and Participatory” meetings
- Everyone’s skills used
- Flat leadership structures ...
No Big Pyramids Please!

Economics

- Mutual support or Communal living
- Financial support for traveling apostles / teachers

Entropy

- house-church “networks”, *not* stand-alone groups
- inside vs. outside the institutional church ???

Essential Elements of Healthy Movements

- Revival - outreach / mission
- Renewal - passionate faith and obedience
- Reform - New Testament church “organizational” structures



A Prophetic Word???

“A revolution is coming to Christianity that will eclipse the Reformation in the sweeping changes that it brings to the Church.

When it comes the present structure and organization of the Church will cease to exist, and the way the world defines Christianity will be radically changed.

What is coming will not be a change of doctrine, but a change in basic church life. The changes that are coming will be so profound that it will be hard to relate the present form of church structure and government to what is coming.

The future leaders of the Church are now being given a vision of radical New Testament Christianity being restored to the earth.”

Rick Joyner
The Morning Star Prophetic Bulletin
“Revolution”, May 2000

Resources



For more on the history and nature
of the house-church movement

Books

Roger Gehring (2004)
House Church and Mission: The Importance of Household Structures in Early Christianity

David Garrison (2004)
Church Planting Movements

Rad Zdero (2004)
The Global House Church Movement

Peter Bunton (2001)
Cell Groups and House Churches: What History Teaches Us

Wolfgang Simson (1998)
Houses that Change the World

E.H. Broadbent (1931/1999)
The Pilgrim Church

Websites

www.housechurch.ca (HouseChurch.Ca, see “Resources” section)

www.ntrf.org (New Testament Restoration Foundation)

www.house2house.com (House 2 House magazine)