

THE PROTESTER

an era of protesting, testifying and demonstration

an **ekerkerk** research and trend report | june 2012

TESTIFY

PROTEST

DEMONSTRATE

protest [*n.* proh-test; *v.* pruh-test, proh-test] an expression or declaration of objection, disapproval, or dissent, often in opposition to something a person is powerless to prevent or avoid: a protest against increased taxation.

testify [tes-tuh-fahy] to bear witness to; affirm as fact or truth; attest. to give or afford evidence of in any manner.



“A generation that can testify about the life changing story of Jesus can testify against the unfairness of the world, and also has a firm grip on technology”

It is as if the whole world is burning!

From Egypt to Syria, from Sudan to South Africa, people are rebelling against what they regard as increasingly inequitable policies.

The era where rules and regulations maintained absolute power over the general public is a thing of the past. We are entering a season in which the motive for all public actions and processes has to be clear and fair – or it doesn't make sense to ordinary people with ordinary lives.

The fact that a traditional figure of authority or organisation implements or stands for something, no longer necessarily makes it the right choice, decision or direction for an emerging generation that lives in a world where everything is knowable and communicable in a moment.

This new world tests everything, measures everything, weighs everything and reacts at the speed of light when there is the slightest trace of unfairness or intransparency. No one is safeguarded against the voice of the masses. This is a world where people do not hesitate to take drastic steps against the instigators of unfairness.

For the church this is of crucial importance. There are so many underlying causes and effects that give rise to this wildfire that we simply have to sit up and take note of this emerging trend.

The word “protest” is derived from the Latin word “pro” which means, for, on behalf of or in favour of, and the word “test” is derived from the word “testari”, which means talk on behalf of, stand up for or witness. This is also the derivation of the English word “testify”. If we wanted to play around with the etymology of the word, to protest or demonstrate actually means to testify on its or someone's behalf, or in favour of something!

No wonder then that the lines between testify and demonstrate are becoming increasingly fainter. It is as if a new generation of activists day by day conjures up more love and compassion for the oppressed. They are changing the world right under our very noses! And they do not make a distinction between their faith in Christ and their responsibility for a fair dispensation.

Welcome to the era of the “protestor”.

“OCCUPY” MOVEMENT

The Occupy Wall Street movement reacted in protest to the latest financial statistics in America, specifically with reference to the fact that the system is increasingly enriching the rich and impoverishing the poor.

The movement extended to other capital cities throughout the world, and has been chosen by the leading business and leadership magazine Fast Company Magazine as the seventh most innovative movement, organisation of entity of the year!

Unfortunately even demonstrations and their participants can later become institutions that evoke unfairness and dislike! When the Occupy Wall Street movement became too institutional for some people, they immediately launched their own anti-resistance movement!

In the words of Saul, a masked anonymous protestor: “These guys are totally bogus. I heard on NPR today that they have trademarked the name ‘Occupy Wall Street’. Just look around you, man, look at all the bogus t-shirts. Somebody’s cashing in here. We’re going to put a stop to these materialistic pigs. We are going to occupy Occupy Wall Street!”¹

No institution or movement is exempted from protest – clearly not even protesters.

EVERYBODY KNOWS OF “JOSEPH KONY”

Surely the most notorious protest action of the past year was from the Invisible Children organisation that uploaded a thirty minute YouTube video as part of their campaign against the use of child soldiers in the rebel camps of Uganda².

The much discussed video attracted nearly 100 million viewers in six days, and before long was the piece of media that reached the largest number of people in the shortest time in living memory. The campaign reached millions of young people worldwide, and inspired them to tangible resistance against the inhuman actions of Joseph Kony and his hastily assembled army, so much so that posters, T-shirts and slogans appeared in every town, city and street in the world.

EGYPT IS BURNING

The Egyptian revolution against Hosni Mubarak’s government initially was one of the first that relied heavily on public participation, especially on the internet. In just two and a half weeks, from 25 January 2011 to 11 February 2011, Facebook and Twitter users succeeded in dethroning the head of state, Hosni Mubarak by means of the distribution of information. In the process the government blocked all social media platforms, in an effort to muzzle the public’s voice.

1. <http://dreadmonger.com/2011/10/31/authentic-protesters-to-occupy-occupy-wall-street/>

2. <http://mashable.com/2012/03/10/kony-2012-sxsw/>

Wael Ghonim wasn't just one of the bigwigs at the internet giant Google, but he also initially incited the Egyptian protests on Twitter. One of his tweets after the protest action was: "Now our nightmare is over. Now it is time to dream."

GOOGLE, PEPSI AND A NEW GENERATION THAT CARES

When the world's largest companies are adjusting their investments due to moving trends, it is well worth it to take note. Jane Wales, president of the Global Philanthropy Forum, is an advisor for most of the leading brand names such as Google, Pepsi and other youth related companies, in order to position them to reach an emerging generation of activist young people. New marketing strategies are less and less about the merits of a product or service, and more and more about the way the relevant company contributes to a more equitable and healthy world.

Wales's advice to most organisations is the following: "This is probably the first generation that I'm not saying, why aren't they more like we were? I'm saying, why weren't we more like they are? They know what they're up against. They know what they want to build. This is a great generation."³

GEORGE CLOONEY IN A NEW ROLE

The actor and social activist, George Clooney, has been supporting oppressed people in many of the North African countries for a long time. Especially Sudan, which this year again made news headlines because of uprisings, demonstrations and public protest, was on his radar.

Clooney attracted unprecedented public support for Sudan when he took part in an illegal demonstration outside the Sudanese embassy in America, and was arrested and jailed by local authorities. The whole episode once again showed that the general public is ready to let their voice be heard when it comes to pointing out and eliminating unfairness and uncaring policies. Even if it takes an influential person to ignite the fire.

TIME – MAGAZINE PERSON OF THE YEAR

The wave of protest and demonstrations also came to the attention of the leading news magazine TIME, so much so that they awarded the prestigious Person of the Year award that has previously been won by people like Bono, George W Bush and Mark Zuckerberg, for 2012 to the faceless and anonymous demonstrator.

A short excerpt from the article that accompanies the award reads as follows:

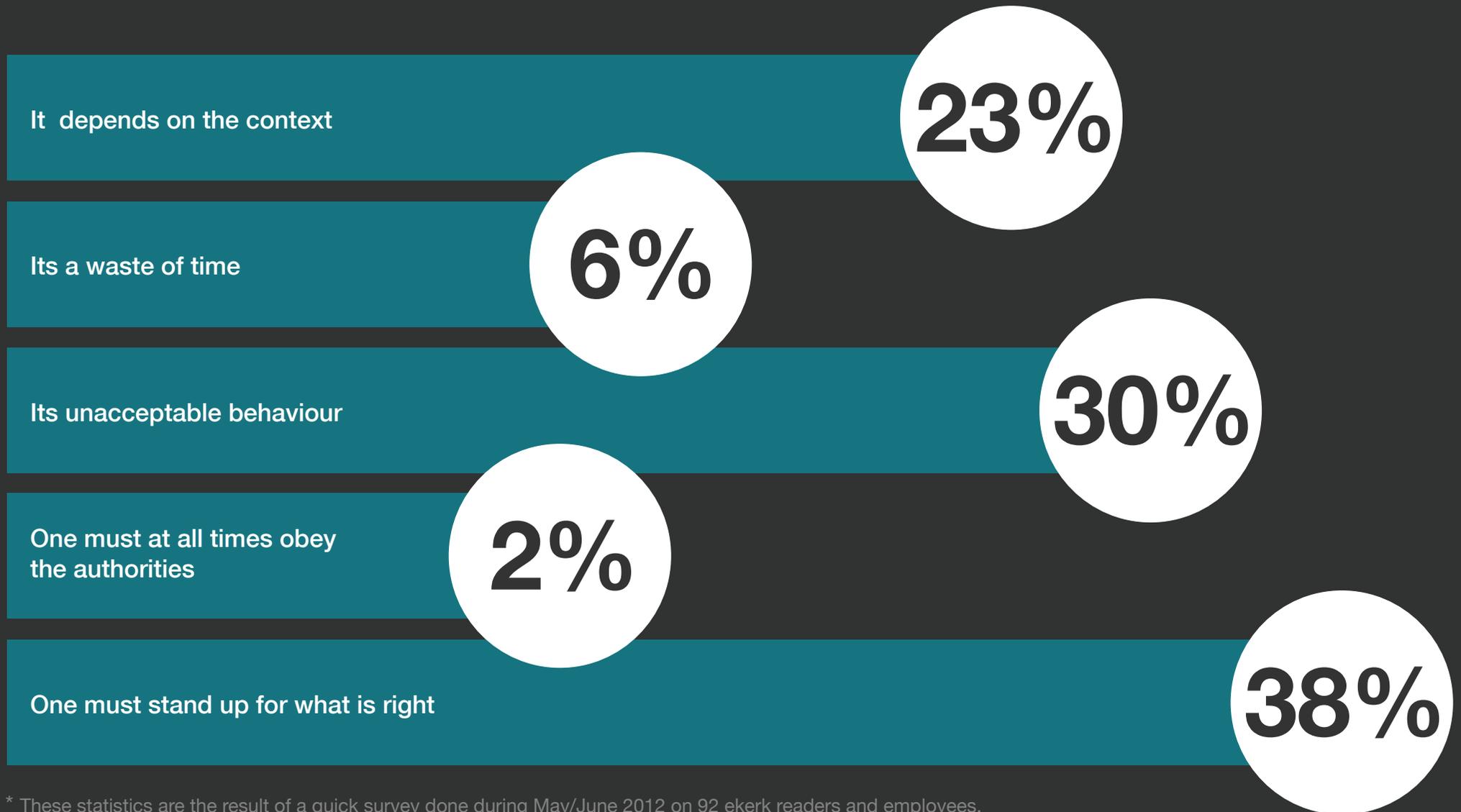
"Is there a global tipping point for frustration? Everywhere, it seems, people said they'd had enough. They dissented; they demanded; they did not despair, even when the answers came back in a cloud of tear gas or a hail of bullets. They literally embodied the idea that individual action can bring collective, colossal change."⁴

3. <http://www.fastcoexist.com/1679533/google-pepsi-and-the-new-generation-of-philanthropists>

4. <http://www.time.com/time/person-of-the-year/2011/>

QUICK SURVEY*

What is your opinion on protesting?



* These statistics are the result of a quick survey done during May/June 2012 on 92 ekerk readers and employees.

LOCAL TRENDS

It will be a grave mistake to think that the wave of protest did not reach South Africa. Throughout our country we see proof that groups of people raised their voice by means of technology, and on various other platforms.

THE NOTORIOUS TWEET MODELS

When Jessica Leandra Dos Santos and Tshidi Thamana tackled each other on Twitter about their respective racist remarks, the whole country was in a state of commotion. They yielded to public pressure shortly afterwards, and both of them took part in various public expressions of mutual reconciliation and forgiveness.⁵

Public resistance on Facebook, Twitter and the printed media against their statements gained so much momentum in a record time that the DA spokesperson Mmusi Maimane insisted to arrange a breakfast at his home with the two models. Maimane explained to Dos Santos exactly how much the k-word offends him while the white woman asked Thamana if she really wishes that all white people were dead.

After the meeting Maimane said: *“The whole affair got poisonous, someone had to take the sting out of it.”*

#TWITPICYOURCITYPRESS

With reference to the massive debacle around Brett Murray’s controversial painting of President Jacob Zuma, the City Press newspaper published the painting, and got even more negative reaction from the ruling party.

So much so that a senior ANC official and minister Blade Nzimande appealed to the public to boycott the newspaper.

However, the public reaction to his proposal was of a much different nature, and on Sunday, 29 May 2012, the subject #twitpicyourcitypress was the highest listed trend on the social network Twitter. Artists, celebrities, journalists and ordinary people used the social platforms to act against the seemingly one-sided authoritarian action, and took a collective stand against what they regarded as the unfair use of power. Needless to say, the joint conscience of the masses won the day against the institutional law.

RHODES UNIVERSITY TAKES A STAND

During March 2012 a protest action by a training institution for the first time appeared top of the list of talking points on the social network Twitter.

When the term #RUSilent appeared on everyone’s phones, the world took notice of a group of 70 students that protested with taped mouths against the discrimination against victims of sexual offences, especially rape. The action created an international sensation, with the organiser, Larissa Klazinga’s words: *“Our protest is to make the silence visible. It’s to show that critical voice that has been taken away.”*⁶

5. Vir die hele storie, lees hier: <http://www.rapport.co.za/Suid-Afrika/Nuus/Twiet-twis-ontlont-20120512>

6. <http://www.timeslive.co.za/local/2012/03/23/rhodes-stages-anti-rape-silent-protest>

ECHURCH'S OWN COMMUNITY

Time and again the echurch web team has noticed that the most effective way to activate our online community is to ask something, expect something or to inspire some action from our readers.

We notice that the echurch community no longer wants to sit back and receive. Even if initially it is only in a virtual way, they are ready to take part, talk back, take a stand for something and make a real change in the world, and the web statistics prove it.

The moment the ball is in their court, it is as if readers and listeners take action, and then become catalysts for positive change in their immediate world.

It has been remarked in the past that local web users are a little behind international trends, but at echurch we see that South African web users are just as interactive and participating as their Western peers – especially when they have an opportunity to make an eternal difference!

Through various emergency aid and charity projects we see how local web users mobilise online to change the world, and allow the kingdom of God in their own local life space.





“Our protest is to make the silence visible. It’s to show that critical voice that has been taken away.”

ECCLESIASTIC WITNESSES - PROTESTORS

It will be a grave mistake to think that the wave of protest did not reach South Africa. Throughout our country we see proof that groups of people raised their voice by means of technology, and on various other platforms.

“ORDINARY” CLERGY WITHOUT TITLES TAKE A STAND

On 19 May Bishop Johannes Seoka, chairman of the SARK and bishop of the St Albans Anglican Church in Pretoria announced that their church is closing its doors. This follows after the resignation of Father Rudolph Paulse who apparently received death threats from certain parishioners. Allegations were also made about the leadership’s intransparent handling of funds. A number of concerned parishioners and other stakeholders took the bull by the horns and went to court. On 20 May the Pretoria High Court ruled that Father Paulse had to be reinstated in his position and that the church doors should be opened with immediate effect.

Another example is that in the Reformed Church where a grassroots movement, SteedsHervormers, is resisting the decision of the BAKV (extraordinary general church meeting) of the Reformed Church last year where the justification of apartheid has been rejected. On 4 June 2012 Neels Jackson reported in Beeld that the Steedshervormers has declared a state of confession against their church association. In their opinion the decision concerning apartheid by their church association would boil down to a repudiation of Christ. At the SteedsHervormers’s meeting on 2 June, which was attended by 370 parishioners and 40 ministers of the Reformed Church, this protest was heard.

In the same breath similar movements at grassroots level are currently underway with regard to resolutions of the NG Church concerning Belhar, as well as in other church associations in South Africa regarding theological training.

THE COURT ROUTE

Another noteworthy local trend is the increasing number of appeals to courts by protesters to arbitrate between them and other clergy. Tebogo Monama refers to the aforementioned articles in the Sowetan to a high court case about the tension about new leadership in St Johns AFM Church in Katshehong. In Kwazulu-Natal the case between the Shembe brothers about the succession of their father as new leader of the Nazareth Baptist Church is being heard by the Durban High Court. The Johannesburg High Court is also hearing the case between a regional leader of the Methodist Church Randfontein and a parishioner. Meanwhile the AGS’s theological training is on a similar route of legal proceedings that have been on-going since 2008.

8. <http://www.sowetanlive.co.za/news/2012/05/21/st-albans-fights-bishop---court-order-to-hold-service>

9. <http://www.steedshervormers.co.za> 10. <http://www.docstoc.com/docs/75058355/THE-APOSTOLIC-FAITH-MISSION-OF-SOUTH-AFRICA-THE-APOSTOLIC-FAITH->

POSSIBLE OTHER TRENDS

Examples that highlight the new wave of testitarorship in church circles are stressed in the front page article in Die Kerkbode of 30 May 2012 concerning the robust conversations on the internet about freedom of speech. This follows the NG Church's new ethical code for the use of their social media that sparked intense Facebook conversations. In these conversations protest is also related to conversations about freedom of speech on one hand as well as the right to maintaining the ethical integrity of specific social media on the other hand. This kind of conversations also illustrates the increasing use of the internet to give "ordinary clergy" a platform and a voice (according to Clay Shirky's understanding of the www world's underlying new value system of Here comes everybody: The power of organizing without organizations, 2008).

With the increasing utilization of the internet, the movement of parishioners outwards "who are voting with their feet" is an additional result of a quieter, but just as real church protest.

Research, such as that of David Kinnaman (You lost me: why young Christians are leaving church, 2011) indicate that more than 60% of young adults in the USA are leaving the church after years of active involvement as teenagers.

Locally declining numbers of most church associations would probably also be an indication of this direction.



FACTORS & CONSEQUENCES

Like any movement there should be certain factors that give prominence to this trend of “the testitator”. This can be explained as a chemical reaction. A chemical reaction is a process that leads to the transformation or origin of a range of new chemical reactions to consequently create a new chemical element. This new element is not something new that is created, it has simply not been involved and present in the chemical reaction. The new element is therefore created from the specific chemical reactions. A chemical reaction can be spontaneous or it can be a reaction where the addition of energy causes the chemical reaction. What this means with regard to the trend of testitator is that no new factors are involved. It exists and has originated from existing factors from the world. However, it may be regarded as the correct arrangement of these factors to cause a reaction which in turn will cause a new series of reactions. The emphasis is on the correct arrangement of certain factors.

Let us look at the factors that this trend of the testitator can bring to a reaction:

We see that one of the factors is fairness and genuineness.

It may also be regarded as the first factor that brings about the burning passion for change. The reason for this testitator trend is the presence of unfairness in the search for genuineness. In today’s digital world

people seek genuineness and fairness. The digital world where the social platforms such as Facebook and Twitter rule, seeks transparency with regard to fairness and genuineness. This is true for all sectors – from government to consumer sectors. The digital world is a flat world where everyone has a platform to be part of transparency and genuineness.

We see an overwhelming, burning passion or zeal for change

everywhere. People demonstrate when they feel they cannot continue in the same manner and that things have to change. They look back and regard the past as better, or they look to the future and see that things simply have to be better. Or they look at their present circumstances and see that other people, groups, cultures are better off and that there has been unfairness. The testitator acts on behalf of his/her own well-being or the well-being of their group or tribe (thank you to Seth Godin, [Tribes: We need you to lead us](#)). In contrast it can also be an action of love towards someone else, where a person testitrates for the sake of someone else’s well-being and not his own. It is about the well-being of others where the group does not testitrate because an injustice was done to the group, but that someone of some institution acted with injustice and unfairness and a group is on the receiving end of it.

1. <http://dreadmonger.com/2011/10/31/authentic-protesters-to-occupy-occupy-wall-street/>

2. <http://mashable.com/2012/03/10/kony-2012-sxsw/>

The shift away from the modern to a digital era is also behind these testitrations. It means that people do not want to be bossed around by an entity or person. This is the reason why monarchies and dictators could rule for such a long time, they came into power in a modern era where the truth could easily be hidden. Due to the fact that this has changed over time and we find ourselves in a digital world, the truth can no longer conveniently be hidden away. If people do not agree with the government's or someone's view they demonstrate. They simply don't take only yes for an answer.

The origin of social media and then also the explosion of the digital world is an important factor for the origin of the testitrator era.

Think back to the huge call-up and aid that Facebook and Twitter created in Egypt. This means that the truth can and may not be suppressed. The world is flat (Thomas Friedman, [The World is Flat](#)) and fluid (Len Sweet, [AquaChurch 2.0](#)). The digital world that we find ourselves in entail that we can see what is going on around the world in the palm of our hands (cell phones). This made the world much smaller. The digital era that we find ourselves in today, encourages us to think for ourselves. It can be through a tweet, Facebook post or a blog post. To live in the digital era means that we are living in a world of newly considered relationships. With the development of social networks such as Facebook and Twitter, people of the digital era are rewired to think in terms of new relationships. The digital era furthermore opens up a world of connectivity. Everything is connected. In this way the golden thread can be seen much easier in today's events. Another result of the digital era of today is the shift of knowledge. In the pre-modern and

modern era a certain group of people thought for masses of people. In the digital era we are encouraged to seek answers ourselves. We are our own 'think-boss'. No-one has to think for us. (Look at Clay Shirky, Here comes everybody: The power of organizing without organizations and Charles Leadbeater, We-Think: Mass innovation, not mass production).

We have already looked at the factors of the testitrator trend as well as the factors involved. We can now look at the following consequences:

It is no longer easy to suppress the truth or the facts.

Before the digital era, it was much easier to suppress the truth to prevent it from becoming public property. This entails that some people who had the power and ability could prevent the truth from being communicated. It can entail that someone does something and they don't want it to become public knowledge. Today this is much more difficult. The digital era makes the world smaller so that the truth cannot be suppressed so easily. This is because of the emergence of the digital era where everyone has his own platform to proclaim the truth.

Another consequence is that the companies, governments and other entities continuously have to put their money where their mouths are. They cannot just make empty promises any longer.

The people expect honesty and openness. If this is not the case, the testitrators could use any of the platforms to get their demonstration going. The testitrators feel obliged to share the truth with the digital world, which in this era is the whole world.



“Is there a global tipping point for frustration? Everywhere, it seems, people said they’d had enough. They dissented; they demanded; they did not despair, even when the answers came back in a cloud of tear gas or a hail of bullets. They literally embodied the idea that individual action can bring collective, colossal change.”

IMPLICATION FOR **THE CHURCH**

The most striking implication for religious communities today is the emergence of an activist, socially aware generation that have the ability and responsibility to change the world according to their own inherent sense of fairness.

These young people are the direct opposite of their parents and ancestors who followed figures of authority implicitly out of a mutual respect and trust.

The modern protesters are not rebels for any other reason than their longing for a better, healthier world for themselves and their fellow man.

They are simultaneously witnesses, demonstrators and technological magicians.

When they combine their own realisation of love with their unprecedented access to communication and media, the world listens, and things change at a rate that we have never seen before.

Don Tapscott describes it as follows: *“They prize freedom and freedom*

of choice. They want to customize things, make them their own. They’re natural collaborators, who enjoy a conversation, not a lecture. They’ll scrutinize you and your organization. They insist on integrity. They want to have fun, even at work and at school. Speed is normal. Innovation is part of life.” (Grown up Digital, 2009)

The testitators of our time especially have the following things in common:

1. They have the **right, ability** and **responsibility** to affect social change.
2. In general they act **on behalf of another group** of which they do not form part.
3. In many instances their actions are **at their expense**, on financial, social or other levels.
4. The overriding motivation behind most of their protest actions is a **love for others, caring for those with less** and an all-consuming **identification with the need in the world.**

APPLICATION FOR **THE CHURCH**

As surely most of the most influential organisations in local young people's lives in South Africa, it is important to understand that even the Christian church is not exempted from any protest action against unfair actions.

Given the international and local trends around protest and demonstration, it will be interesting to think what a religious community will look like that work side by side with people in an effort to get the world to look more and more like God's new earth.

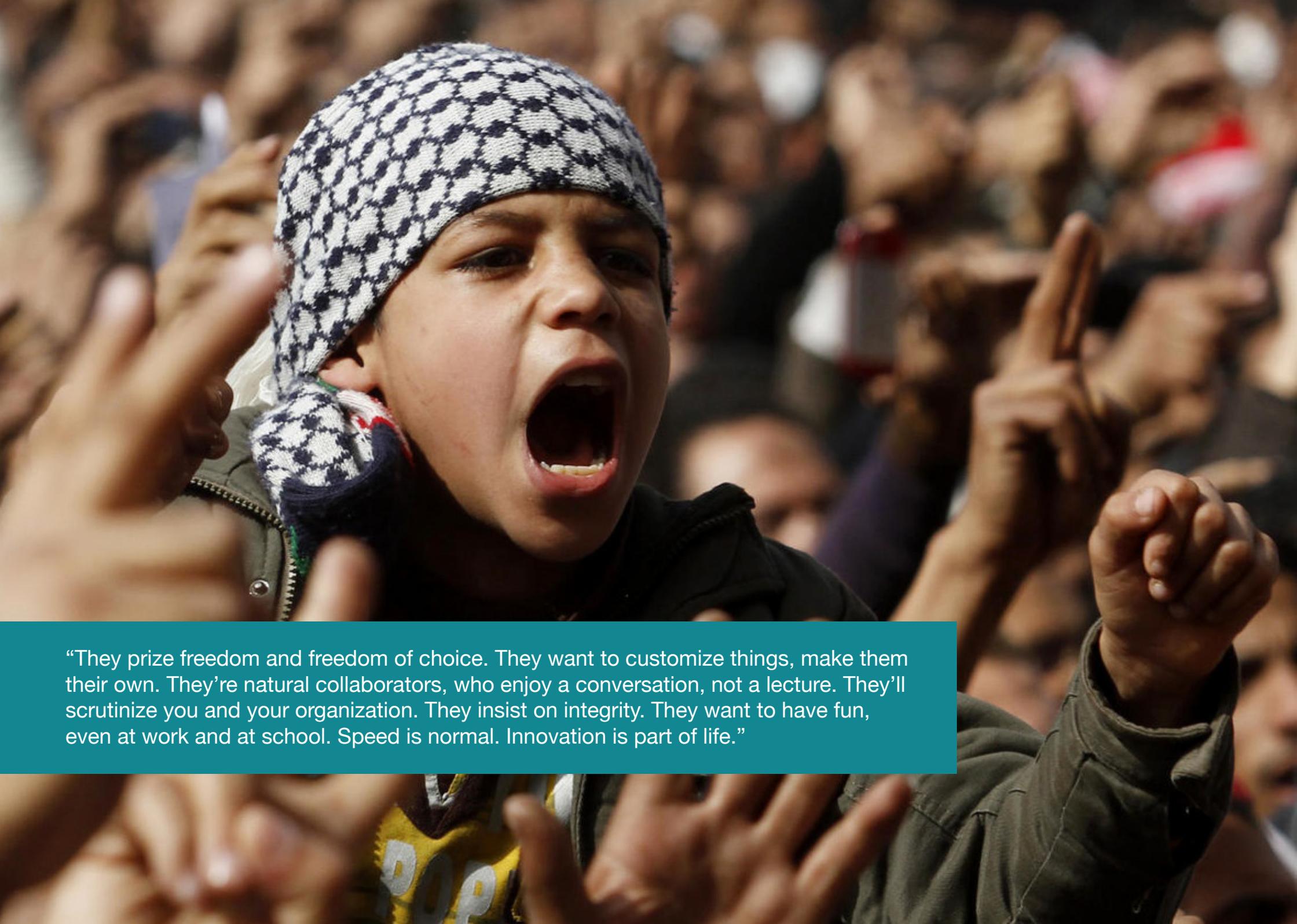
Instead of becoming an unoriginal institution with positional authority in a few people's lives, how can the church in general move towards becoming an organisation community with personal influence in an entire new generation's lives?

The world is ahead of the church when it comes to the transformation of unfairness into fairness, and rejection into mercy. The largest application for the church as witness, demonstrator and technological magician will be:

1. To associate with the need of the world, locally and internationally on a daily basis;
2. To master the language of the day, and be absolutely literate in the areas of technology and media;
3. To point out the relationship between peace on earth and the kingdom of God to a generation of young people that are desperate for the love and mercy as we find it in the person of Jesus Christ.

It would appear that the worldwide movement in the direction of a strong identity forming, even nationalist, group identity is rubbing off on local church associations and individuals. Individuals' strong identification with specific "clan" or "tribe" values that in their opinion are neglected by their local churches of denominations on moral or theological terrain, form the basis for different forms of protests. Protest is often linked to Martin Luther's adage "Here I stand; I can do no other" and supported by Bible verses and claims that it is a divine sanctioned protest that leaves the testitators no other choice.

These could very well be important new signs of dangerous winds that are starting to blow in the local church arena!



“They prize freedom and freedom of choice. They want to customize things, make them their own. They’re natural collaborators, who enjoy a conversation, not a lecture. They’ll scrutinize you and your organization. They insist on integrity. They want to have fun, even at work and at school. Speed is normal. Innovation is part of life.”

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1. **“Authentic” Protesters to Occupy Occupy Wall Street | Dreadmonger**
2. **Why ‘Slacktivists’ Are More Active Than You Think | Mashable**
3. **“Viral” deur Leonard Sweet, 2012 Waterbrook Press | Amazon.com**
4. **Wikileaks op Twitter | Twitter.com**
5. **Twiet-twis ontloot | Rapport**
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7. **Rhodes stage anti-rape silent protest | Times Live**
8. **Definisie van “protest” | Dictionary.Referance.com**
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15. **Kony 2012 becomes the most viral video in history | Mashable**
16. **George Clooney arrested | The Telegraph**
17. **#twitpicyourCityPress | Twitter.com**

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Research by Stephan Joubert, Pierre Engelbrecht & Mynhardt van Pletsen.

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Thank You for reading!

