

## Millions are Leaving the Organized Church

According to researcher and noted Christian statistician, George Barna, North America is in the early stages of what may well become the most significant spiritual reformation of the past hundred years! Unlike previous Great Awakenings, this new movement involves people coming away from reliance upon the organized church and into a deeper direct connection with God. Already in the United States, millions of Christians have stopped "going to church." Barna, the most quoted person in the Christian church today, expects that in 20 years "only about one-third of the population will rely upon a local congregation as the primary or exclusive means for experiencing and expressing their faith."

How big is this silent revolution? According to Barna, some 20 million people, dubbed "Revolutionaries", have left the Institutionalized Church in North America and are now living "a first-century lifestyle based on faith, goodness, love, generosity, kindness, and simplicity". These are people who "zealously pursue an intimate relationship with God" and are now experiencing freedom in Christ as never before. For Christians in other countries like China, Russia, Indonesia and North Korea, this manner of worship has been commonplace for years, and by necessity. But for North America, this is a new concept for many.

The following is a written interview with a member of one such local organic assembly. This assembly of about 40 individuals has been meeting locally for about five years in homes and also in a rented conference room at the Courtyard by Marriott in downtown Springfield.

**You describe yourselves as an *organic assembly*. Can you explain that term?**

We occasionally use that expression in much the same manner as one would describe organic fruits and vegetables. For crops to be truly organic, they must be grown and developed naturally. Organic gardens are those where food is produced with the use of natural feed or fertilizer, consisting of plant or animal components. Organic gardeners do not use chemical

formulated fertilizers, growth stimulants, antibiotics, or pesticides. Even the seed must be the result of natural pollination.

Similarly, we see the church as a living organism rather than an institutional organization. The church is the natural expression of Jesus, called out as a spiritual family to live out and pursue His mission on this earth. The existence of the church and the success of its mission is not dependent on church traditions, creeds or religious ceremonies. If all of these were absent, the church would still exist and prosper because the church consists of born again people.

For instance, when chemical pesticides were first developed, they had a good intent – to kill pests that were harmful to gardens. However, many of the chemical pesticides have been found to be harmful to humans when consumed, causing cancer and other physical ailments. Likewise, there are things that have been introduced into Christianity that were well intentioned, but have now outlived their intended purpose and may be causing more harm than good.

**You also describe yourself as a *simple church*. What does that mean?**

We are all about keeping things simple. Most of our assembly meetings are focused on every day practical living issues and experiences. We believe that the Bible is to be understood experimentally, but in many traditional churches, the religious dogma is so complicated that few can really understand it. When we can't understand something, we cannot properly apply it to our life. Rather than hire a seminary trained expert who has been taught to expound on his or her particular denomination's liturgies, creeds and doctrines, our approach is to simply allow those who have been gifted by God as leaders to facilitate discussions where all members contribute, from the old to the young. No single person can possibly understand everything, but collectively, we get a much more complete and better picture because we can compare our individual ideas and personal experiences. And because of the family-like atmosphere, asking questions and sharing ideas is always encouraged. When it comes down to it, our focus is simply, loving God and loving each other.

## **You talk much about the Institutional Church. Can you explain that expression?**

As a friend recently put it, when we hear the word “*church*” today, what is the first thing that comes to mind? Most picture it as something that people do on a Sunday morning. People, dressed in their finest apparel, head to a building with lined-up pews and a pulpit. Worship songs are sung, the offering plate is passed and a monologue is given. Attendees sit in silence staring at a preacher who is usually standing on the elevated platform in the front. Occasionally, a nod of the head is seen or an “amen” can be heard by a church member. Religious rituals are observed. The building is clean and the lawn is nicely mowed and manicured. In such settings, fellowship is reduced to a ritualistic performance. Once the final word is said, the people usually rush out to go home, only to forget most of what was heard. Next Sunday, same thing. This is what we mean when we use the expression *Institutional Church*.

## **So, are you against all organized religion?**

Within every church body there must be a certain amount of organization. So, we are not opposed to organization, within its proper place. What we oppose is having a religious form that takes precedence over function.

## **How important do you think it is for people to gather in a corporate setting?**

We think it is very important for Christians to gather together collectively. We meet regularly, but we also communicate with each other frequently throughout the week. The biggest difference we see between an organic assembly and Institutional Church along this line is that we gather together out of a sense of genuine love for God and for each other, rather than being motivated by guilt, duty or obligation.

## **Are organic assemblies all the same?**

No, and that is the beauty of them. No two are exactly alike. Some may be more doctrinally focused, some practical living focused, some more musically oriented, some traditional, some contemporary and some

missional. While the DNA of Jesus Christ is at the core of each assembly, it is expressed in many different ways. Any one city may have a variety of organic assemblies.

### **Isn't there more of a chance for heretical teachings to develop among isolated groups?**

One could make that argument, but isn't that the real basis for why we have the many denominations today? Someone thought that a particular teaching or practice was in error, so they decided to start a new denomination as a result. With organic assemblies, there is complete accountability among all the members. Every teaching is discussed openly and a general consensus is reached. No central person controls the local body and the leaders are held accountable to each other and to all of the members. Therefore, if a particular teaching or practice cannot be explained to the satisfaction of the members, it can be easily rejected.

### **Are you saying that organic assemblies do not have a central leader, such as a Senior Pastor?**

Most Christians agree that Christ as the operating Head of the church, both universally and locally. He is our central leader and it is because of Him that we experience true life in the body of Christ. As the Head of the church, He distributes spiritual gifts to various members of the body according to His divine will and purpose, which include the ministering gifts of pastoring, teaching, church planting, evangelizing and prophesying. As He distributes these gifts among the body, members will recognize them operating and will benefit from all of them. Therefore, we place no restriction as to whom or how many people are gifted by the Spirit.

### **If you don't have a Senior Pastor, won't there be chaos?**

No. Having been in many gatherings of an organic nature, we have yet to experience one where there was chaos. If God's Spirit is allowed to flow freely from heart to heart, there will always be edification taking place and order within the gathering. Most organic assemblies also have a plurality of

overseeing elders, whose responsibility is to ensure that order is maintained, should the need ever arise.

**So you view the church as more of a living organism rather than a static inanimate institution?**

Oh, definitely! The life and mission of the church cannot be contained within four walls of a building. Meetings are for the purpose of corporate worship, learning and mutual edification of the members. They are not the central focus of all activities of the local assemblies. No structure, form or religious ritual can ever be a substitute for life in Christ, brought about by the transformation of salvation.

**Can you describe what a meeting of an organic assembly might be like?**

Well, first, no two meetings are alike. We allow the Spirit of God to lead each meeting according to the needs of those present and in accordance to His intended purpose for that particular gathering. Some gatherings may be focused on helping a member who may be struggling or dealing with a difficult situation in their life. Other members may share their personal experiences and offer up seasoned advice. Prayer will likely be offered up for the person, with all members being in agreement. Other meetings may consist of worshipping God through song, exhortation or personal testimony. Often times, a leader will introduce and expound upon a particular topic in the Bible and all members will participate in open discussion. Some meetings will be times of sharing what God is doing in the lives of the members and their individual ministries. Other gatherings will focus on discussing ways to better reach our community with the gospel. Most meetings will have a combination of some or all of the above. Often times, a meal is shared. Participation in the meetings is always on a voluntary basis. Dress is casual and modest. Seating arrangements are much like you would see in a family living room.

Here is what you will not see: You will find no paid staff members. There are no big “I”s or little “u”s. No offerings will be taken. Members are encouraged to support local charities and their own personal ministries or

outreach efforts. An offering box may be available for those wishing to help cover a minimal conference room rental fee and to allow us to collectively meet larger financial needs of others. No one will be heard hollering or screaming, or making threats of eternal hell fire to members who are not in compliance with an agreed set of standards or beliefs. No distinguishing titles will be used such as Bishop, Reverend, Pastor, Prophet, Minister, etc...

**How can someone learn more about your assembly or about organic assemblies in general?**

They can follow us on our website, [www.JesusSavesFromSin.com](http://www.JesusSavesFromSin.com) or contact us via e-mail at [Back2TheBible@aol.com](mailto:Back2TheBible@aol.com). We are also on FaceBook at Gospel Outreach Ministry. There is also a large selection of books that are now becoming available by various organic assembly writers.