



EXIT

by Stephen Crosby

Nones AND Dones

According to sociologist, Josh Packard, in his scrupulously researched book, *Church Refugees*, there are currently 65,000,000 individuals in the USA who are “done” with church, nearly one-half of those retaining their “faith,” the balance having no “faith affiliation.”

The nones and dones are not rebellious, wounded, bitter, Absaloms, Jezebels and heretics as they are so

often caricatured. They are often the best, the brightest, the finest, most faithful and the most committed to Christ—those who take their faith very seriously. There are another 7,000,000 “on their way” to being done for a total of 72,000,000 nones and dones.

In the United States, there are also approximately 65,000,000 believers who self-identify as being part of an organized church.

Thirty to fifty percent of those who confess Christ in the USA, are **done** with “church,” (organized, institutional religion) or soon will be.

In the light of the number of nones and dones, is not some self-reflection in leadership in order rather than common responses of self-defensiveness, excuses, rationalizations, self-justifications, program-

hubris, because of issues of ego, money, control and power that make self-reflection impossible. It is a form of religious bondage, blindness and

gimmicky quick fixes. We would not dally around the perimeters of our operation, changing fringe features.

We would do a thorough and

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commitment to the status quo.

The “Dones”— Exasperated with Church and Gone

Could it not be that maybe there is something fundamentally out of whack in our beliefs, values, methods and what we have been calling “church” and “leadership” in the west for a very, very long time?

Could it not be that 30-65,000,000 folks might have a point or two worth considering? Is labeling, black-listing and scapegoating them an appropriate response?

Could it not be that God, by the Holy Spirit, is trying to say something to, and in, existing structures about core beliefs and values, and is he finding a welcome reception?

If you or I owned a business (and alas, church is often too much like a business) and 30-50% or more of our customers vanished, would we blame our customers? Of course not.

We would examine our product, services and market to identify something that has gone awry. We would not be passive. We would panic.

If we lost 30-50% of our client base, we would not fine tune or try to tweak this or that. We would not resort to



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tweaking, accusations and labeling of everyone who leaves as “having a problem with authority” and other slanderous labels?

I propose that thinking 30-65,000,000 people are all rebels, missing God, and “outside of his will,” to be a preposterous and outlandish proposition. It is grounded in

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deep assessment of our operation from top to bottom.

Only in the dysfunctional world of religious Christianity would these eminently reasonable actions in the face of evidence not be considered.

We try to tweak existing structures and methods to try to be more “generationally relevant.” We try contemporary worship. We try fixing or amending this or that program, not realizing that all these efforts are just rearranging the deck chairs on the Titanic: the ship is sinking.

We fixate on changing



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methodology, never considering our message, values, beliefs, structures and ethics may need a tuneup, overhaul or jettisoning.

Only in the dysfunctional world of religious Christianity do we accuse those we are supposed to be serving and pretend that everything is just fine. God forbid that there might be something wrong with our paradigms, particularly as they relate to leadership.

So, What Can We Learn?

Steve, are you saying God is not

at work in those self-identified as associated with organized churches? No I am not. God can use anything, anyone, anytime, anywhere.

However, we must not confuse the reach of his redemptive goodness with his approbation of those structures into which his redemptive goodness reaches.

There is a difference between what his grace can do with what he is given, and the motion in history of the people of God. There are lots of good, wonderful and faithful people selflessly toiling away, some

very effectively, in very bad systems and constructs.

Daniel was effective in Babylon. Joseph did fine in Egypt. Jesus was not hindered by Jerusalem, nor Paul by Rome. But that is not saying God was endorsing any of the contexts and systems his servants were in.

If we are divinely assigned to a context, that context should not define nor limit our love, power, nor service. If it does, that does not say much about the potency of either our love, power, or service—or perhaps we missed our assignment.

However, there were once thriving apostolic churches in the cities of Asia Minor. Where are they today? Gone. **God's faithfulness and goodness of the moment guarantees no organization or association of believers an indefinite future.**

I am saying that in the face

of such overwhelming facts presented in Packard's book, the very least leaders in the Christian establishment (for lack of a better term), on whatever size, scale, shape or form it manifests can do is some self-reflection rather than scapegoating others.

Let me cut off the: "Why the worry? God will always have his church" voices out there. Of course he will.

The real church is eternal, unstoppable and victorious. God's church is going forward, and God will always have his bride. That is not the point. The issue is twofold:

- The use of guilt, shame, shunning, black-balling, ostracizing and slander of those departed and the pain and damage it causes people. These things are not of Christ's kingdom.

- Assuming that myself personally, or the organization, entity or structure that I am part of is automatically included in that overcoming church, and that the organization is guaranteed perpetuity, because it is "God's church." Not necessarily. If more evidence is required, one need only visit Europe and see the ghostly shells of once vibrant church edifices littering major cities and churches that have been converted to mosques in those same cities.

Lastly, to address the inevitable voices out there that will try to say that we should ignore all this and only "love" and "not speak negatively about the church," or that messages like this are "tearing down the body of Christ," and so forth, I quote here my friend, John Matthews of Kelowna, BC:

1. It is important for people to understand the difference



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between the Church (every follower of Jesus the Christ throughout all time) and the institution frequently called "church" (the human

the associated behaviors or practices of the institution or individuals does not make you unforgiving, someone who "hates your brother," or does

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hierarchical institution consisting of many denominations and organizations that usually meets in a building and claims to follow Jesus the Christ). They are not the same thing.

2. Everyone who frequents the institution called "church" and assumes the label "Christian" is not necessarily a follower of Jesus the Christ and therefore not necessarily a "brother or sister."

3. Pointing out the above distinctions and challenging

not love the Body of Christ.

4. It is possible to love the Church while not loving the "church."

Take the time to understand these issues because you will be challenged on one or more of them if you claim to be a Jesus follower. □

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