



Reimagining Church: Pursuing the Dream of Organic Christianity

Frank Viola

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The constructive follow-up to Pagan Christianity, this book is a theology of church as organism rather than church as organization. Official website with supplements <http://www.ReimaginingChurch.org>

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From Reader Review Reimagining Church: Pursuing the Dream of Organic Christianity for online ebook

Bart Breen says

Powerful Followup to Pagan Christianity

Reimagining Church by Frank Viola is the follow-up to Pagan Christianity by Frank Viola and George Barna. Where Pagan Christianity deconstructs the Institutional Church and hierarchical clergy system, Reimagining Church positively asserts and builds up a description of what the early church was and what it can be again.

In presenting this review, I have to disclose that I received a copy of this book from the author to review after establishing contact with the author as a result of a review that I did on his earlier book, Pagan Christianity. No promises were made as to the review I would provide. I expected I would enjoy and appreciate this book based on the first book, but I did not read this book with any predisposition toward giving it a positive review other than what is mentioned above. I've done my best to read and evaluate this book on its own merits with no promises made or implied to the author.

Reimagining Church does a very effective job of not falling into the trap of imitating the early church by sanctifying or advocating those things that are cultural. By a careful examination of Scripture, principles are expounded and drawn out that can in turn be applied today in a manner that supersedes culture or which can be applied in the context of culture without compromise.

The book divides into two parts addressing those components that are most often (wrongly according to the author) associated with "church" in American culture, namely location (a church building) and clergy (hierarchical leadership).

Community and gatherings, addresses first the basic truth of what the New Testament (NT) proclaims is the "church". Church in the NT, "ecclesia" in koine Greek, is never indicative of a set location. It refers to the organic body, or in simpler terms, the people. While this is a commonly accepted truth, in practice, most people still think of Church as a place where you go. The theory doesn't have much impact of most of our practice in this realm.

Reasserting this truth, a case is built from the ground up to imagine what a church might look like that accepts this truth and discards the tradition, the smuggled-in pagan temple practice and the institutional substitute for grass roots, personally and communally experienced faith that Christ seemed to assume, the apostles delivered and confirmed and the early church practiced. Following this reimagining and definition of what the church is (not where it is or how it does things) the issues of meetings, communion, gathering places, family like nature of the church, unity and how this ties into God's overall purposes and plans are examined with much reference to Scripture as well as continual reinforcement of the basic principles which underlie it all.

The second section of the book deals with Leadership and Accountability. In particular it demonstrates how such a church can function without the presence of hired clergy, offices of elders or deacons and without established hierarchy where an artificial distinction is drawn between clergy and laity.

Addressed in this section are the issues of leadership in general, how oversight and authority reside within

the body as a whole, decision-making by consensus, a repudiation of the popular "spiritual covering" practices and understanding of many Christians over the past several decades, authority and submission in the context of no formal hierarchy (apart from the headship of Christ) an examination of the apostolic tradition and then some thoughts and examinations on where the reader who accepts most of these premises can go in their desire to move in this direction.

All in all, this is a book that will challenge many readers and in this reviewer's opinion it bears more than one reading with time taken to reread and examine the claims to determine in one's own heart and mind whether what is taught is in fact grounded in the word of God. I suspect the author himself would encourage this strongly because accepting what is said on the authority of the author would in the end be no better than what the book warns against in terms of the passive acceptance of "truth" within today's institutional and hierarchical churches.

5 stars. I wholeheartedly recommend this book.

Other books to consider if you find this book helpful in my opinion would include Pagan Christianity?: Exploring the Roots of Our Church Practices So You Don't Want to Go to Church Anymore The Shack The Untold Story of the New Testament Church: An Extraordinary Guide to Understanding the New Testament From Eternity to Here: Rediscovering the Ageless Purpose of God and Revolution

Bart Breen

Hadid Boneta says

I'd recommend reading this AFTER having read "Pagan Christianity". It reconstructs and speaks about a way to think about Church as the "something else" we all find ourselves longing for.

Erika says

I'm reading this book to review it for PRISM magazine (esa-online.org/prism) and I am blown away, so far (I'm only on chapter two!), by the new paradigm shift in thinking about how church should -- and could -- be. Think Jesus and his first-century believers and how they practiced church. There was no hierarchy, no sole pastor, no worship service in which the majority of people sat back to watch or listen. It was participatory, spontaneous, and people were okay to interrupt one another if they had a moment of clarity or insight (let's call it prophecy). Pretty radical and different from what is experienced now in church. The Word of God never fails, but religious tradition can stop it if mankind clings to the latter rather than the former...

Brian Stevenson says

This is Frank's reconstruction of what a New Testament church would look like today if it were to follow the New Testament DNA. Using his previous book (Pagan Christianity) like a springboard, he demonstrates why he thinks today's model of church usurps the priesthood of all believers and creates a two-caste model of clergy and laity.

He argues that the hierarchy of professional Christians in the institutional church must be abolished. He introduces a radically different model of "church" where all Christians function as clergy (though, not in a traditional sense).

Ruben says

I saw this book as an examination of the way organized religion functions and embraced it as a book that challenges believers to trust God to build his church, without theological paradigms that hinder and erode the individuals ability to find Christ in the context of other believers. It's a profound book that also showcases the love of God for humanity: minus the religious trappings that send humanity dodging for cover at the very sight of religious followers. I think generation ahead of us, will have a far better slant and review of this gem. It'll be a masterpiece in years to come: long after this generation has passed through the halls of time. I'm grateful to have gotten my hands on it in my lifetime. It has given me a deeper look at Christ in a broader, open way and has allowed my heart to deepen towards my fellow man.

John Barbour says

In *Re-imagining the Church* Frank Viola gets us back to God's original intention for the church. This intention involves an organic, communal expression of the Holy Trinity in His followers. The "organic" church looks much more like a family, which is the dominant metaphor in the New Testament, and less like the corporation that modern "churches" have become.

The modern, institutional church has a pastor that leads a predominantly docile congregation from the pulpit. He is the CEO. It is a command-style, hierarchical business like structure. The authority is positional and official.

The organic church, on the other hand,

Tyler says

Thoroughly enjoyed this follow-up to "Pagan Christianity." It's amazing when you examine the Scriptures historically and contextually to see just how far our Western traditions and concepts of "church" have strayed from God's original design. Thankfully He still works through broken systems and imperfect vessels, but "good is often the enemy of great." Viola was a bit redundant in places, so I don't think it was necessary to make it a 308 page book.

After reading this I'm very curious to experience first-hand what Viola repeatedly refers to as an "organic, open-participatory" church meeting. It would probably feel a bit awkward, seeing that it would be so different from what I've experienced as being "church" or even "small groups" for my entire life. This is most definitely a paradigm-shifting read. The question is, where do I go from here? Many things to pray about, wrestle with, converse w/ others, and contemplate.

Tom says

I also read his book "Pagan Christianity" which discusses how most of what the modern day church does has its roots in paganism, not Scripture. In this book the author imagines how we can return to the practices of the early church, which would be more intimate and caring.

Laura Rogers says

This is the practical application to think about after reading, "Pagan Christianity" (by the same author). So far, I am very taken with it and feel that it puts into words my own experiences with organic church.

Jennifer says

Fantastic! Enormous research to show the church of today doesn't even resemble the church of Jesus in the New Testament.

Jeff says

The companion/sequel to Pagan Christianity, this book takes the idea of the "organic" church and expounds on it with ideas and concepts of how the true church is supposed to work. For anyone who is getting dissatisfied with the "institutional" church, this book is a must read. This is how "church" is supposed to be.

Heather says

The content is solid. Viola could have used a tougher editor, I think, to veer him away from rambles and an overuse of certainty (or at least more references).

Robert says

If you have ever found yourself thinking, "I just can't stand organized religion" or have simply found yourself with a nagging malaise sitting in a pew on Sundays, then this book may be for you. In *Reimagining Church* Frank Viola argues that not only are today's organized, denominational, hierarchical, clergy-laity divided, audience driven churches unhealthy, they are unbiblical. Viola contends that the churches set up by the apostles were home based, non-hierarchical, community focused churches where members interacted as a healthy family, routinely caring for and encouraging each other. Perhaps the most compelling aspect of Viola's experience with home churches is the absolute reliance on Christ as the supernatural head of the church. He frames the question like this. Imagine a run of the mill traditional church, what he calls an

institutional church. Now suppose the Holy Spirit left that church. Would anyone even notice or would business keep moving as usual? Now imagine a small group of believers meeting together in a home without a minute by minute worship plan, without paid clergy to direct the service, and with the mindset of having a spontaneous time of fellowship and worship. Imagine that *organic* church with and without the spirit of Christ. The difference is day and night. In that sense, the thought of an organic church is terrifying -- and inspiring. The book fails to convince that the organic church model is the only biblically correct way of doing things, but it does convince it's a valid option and possibly a really good option. (Caveat: While the ideas in *Reimagining Church* are engaging, the writing is not. It reads as a sermon with a smattering of scholarship. Viola mixes metaphors like Shakespeare in a blender. If you can wade through the morass of language to uncover the conceptual gems within, I recommend this book to you. If that last sentence drove you nuts, look for another book on home churches.)

John Rock says

I have been shaken to the core by this book, much of Viola's research resonates with me on a very deep level. From the very beginning when he admitted that he began his journey because he was "painfully bored" with traditional church I felt that I had met a kindred spirit. Then when he described people in the institutional church as being merely "cogs" in the machine he accurately pinpointed the way I feel that I have fit into the modern day church.

I am left hopeful that God has more - much more - for His people. He emphasizes the leadership of Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit and I am ready for this new journey.

Jesse Jost says

This book was challenging and unsettling. I agree with Viola that in most church, pastors carry far too much of the weight and many members are too content to be passive. However I disagree with Viola in his claims that church cannot thrive as long as there is clergy and a structured meeting. I don't think methods and structure are the real problem facing the church, and scrapping them won't fix our problems. The real problem with a lifeless church is a lack of clear vision of the holiness and majesty of God, and a loss of wonder at the power of the gospel. I think when we place the hope for revival in the church in changing structure or methods, we will just end up being divisive. I think true "organic life" that is found in awe of God, and through spiritual formation led by His Spirit through His Word and humble fellowship with other believers, is a truly powerful force that will thrive in many different organizational structures.
