



# Revolution

*George Barna*

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## **Revolution** George Barna

World-renowned pollster George Barna has the numbers, and they indicate a revolution is already taking place within the Church—one that will impact every believer in America. Committed, born-again Christians are exiting the established church in massive numbers. Why are they leaving? Where are they going? And what does this mean for the future of the Church? Using years' worth of research data, and adhering to an unwavering biblical perspective, Barna predicts how this revolution will impact the organized church, how Christ's body of believers should react, and how individuals who are considering leaving (or those who have already left) can respond. For leaders working for positive change in the church and for believers struggling to find a spiritual community and worship experience that resonates, Revolution is here. Are you ready?

## **Revolution Details**

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Author : George Barna

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# From Reader Review Revolution for online ebook

## David Gregg says

Not the best book out there on this subject, but it's okay.

In my opinion, the author doesn't sound like he had passed through the cynical phase when this book was written. But if you can filter that effectively, or if you are cynical enough yourself, then this may be the book for you. It is a mostly deconstructive book, so if you read it and especially if you are going through the deconstructive phase, then remember that you will eventually need to go through a constructive phase. At that time, look for another book on this. Maybe "So You Don't Want to Go to Church Anymore" by Jake Colson, "The Naked Church" by Wayne Jacobsen, "Reimagining Church" by Frank Viola, or even "The Present Future" by Reggie McNeal.

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## Jon Beadle says

Incredible stats, but a lot of "fluff" in regard to theological implications of a revolutionary movement and the labels he addresses throughout. While his arguments were unconvincing, I found the data to be indispensable.

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## Jeremy Manuel says

It is always interesting when you read a book and wind up disagreeing with it for completely different reasons on each read. This is what happened with George Barna's book *Revolution*. I first read it in seminary and remember not liking it all that much. Having just re-read it, I appreciate it a bit more, but it is still not my favorite book.

*Revolution* is essentially about being a Christian who is tired of the status quo in Christianity. Christians who are tired of the idea that going to church once a week makes you a Christian and tired of churches that are more interested in supporting itself than reaching others with the good news of Jesus Christ.

This may mean that Revolutionaries, as Barna calls them, will leave churches. This doesn't mean that they are leaving their faith, but simply that church is too shallow and self-absorbed for their spiritual lives. Church buildings and congregations were becoming impediments to spiritual life instead of initiators and channels of spiritual life.

This aspect of the book really put me off the first time I read it in seminary. At that point I couldn't appreciate the idea of people who were not connected to a local church. I can appreciate it a bit more now, but still think that our faith is best lived out in conjunction with other people. It could be a formal congregation or a group of people outside of a church congregation to explore faith together.

This is not the part that really tripped me up this time around, but I still found that I didn't quite like the book all that much. Before I explain why that is, I want to look at what I thought the book did well first.

Reading it after it has been out for about ten years shows that Barna was onto something. This can be seen with the rise of groups like the "Dones"; those who have left church, but not the faith. These have been people across the age spectrum who are essentially done with organized church. Couple this with the often mentioned Millennial exodus from the church and I think Barna was onto something.

Another positive of the book is that I think his desire is a good one. This desire is for people to have whole lives that are shaped by their faith. Instead of a faith that shows up on Sunday or other times you may be in the church building or around other Christians, this is a faith that is worked out every day and every place you happen to be.

So if I thought Barna was accurate and thought his overall desire was a good one, why did I still not like the book that much? There is really only one main reason for this, but I find it somewhat hard to articulate.

The book talks about a revolution of how Christians, particularly in the west, will practice their faith. In some ways Barna was accurate on this, but I feel that he missed something in the way he presented his view. Mainly with the language that he used.

It seemed to me that Barna was talking about a revolution but using a lot of the traditional church language. Language like "being crazy for God" and phrases and terminology similar to this. This doesn't seem to be the language of those who are uncertain about church. I could be wrong about this and maybe that language does resonate with more people than I think. It doesn't so much with me and I don't see it used by those I read who are struggling or have struggled with church.

Now I do believe that Barna does mention something about the use of terms and language not mattering, and to a point I agree. However, his talk of revolution doesn't seem all that revolutionary. It seems like a lot of what churches talk about, but allowing for the practice of such a faith outside of a church structure.

Barna talks about a triumphal faith. One of activity and confidence. He doesn't talk much about a faith that lives in tension with doubts. About wrestling and struggling with God. There just doesn't seem to be much room in Barna's revolution for this. Yet, I've read a number of people whose faith is that way, who started revolutions simply because they were open about their doubts and struggles.

I guess this is where *Revolution* just kind of fell flat for me. I think Barna did good predicting that more and more people would pursue faith away from a local congregation. However, I don't think he did the best job at predicting why this would happen. I think he's partly right, but misses it on some significant points.

Maybe part of the dissatisfaction is that *Revolution* somewhat reads like a sales brochure. Barna is completely upfront that he wants you to join his revolution and that's fine. At the same time there is a lot of focus on the positives of what being a revolutionary will do for your faith. This kind of pitch isn't all that different from what many churches pitch, at least in my experience. What many churches don't seem good at is living with the tensions of the ups and downs of life. Unfortunately, *Revolution* isn't too much different than this. Which in my mind makes it far less revolutionary than it might seem.

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## **Matt Black says**

This was an interesting and quick read. I agree with Barna's study that "there are radical changes that are reshaping the Church in America." This book was written in 2005 and I see some of those changes and shifts

still occurring today. I'd be interesting to see if there is a followup study to this 7 years later.

The overall premise of the book is that Barna seems to be noticing that people whom he calls "revolutionaries" are not going to "c" church on Sunday, but are still living a spiritual life and are still a part of the "C" larger worldwide church movement. I agree with the study that this is occurring, yet Barna does not write for going against this premise but rather supports it full force.

My question at the end still stands though: Would Barna say you can still attend a church congregation and be living a solid christian life? He seems to not believe that is possible. Yet, I believe you can and I feel I am a part of a church that strengthens my faith, challenges me, does good in the community (for believers and non-believers), shares life with one another inside and outside the walls on Sunday and many more qualities that Barna states are evident in the "revolutionaries." It is an interesting read that I would love to hear what others think...

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### **Aisha says**

Great little book! In George Barna fashion, there are a few pages of mighty compelling statistics to help build the case of simple church attendance not equalling a Spirit Filled life. Lest we think that once we get someone involved in the local church that is an indicator of spiritual maturity. Not at all! Just as someone could technically not be involved in church yet have a very vibrant and (albeit the rare situation) active walk with The Lord and ministry. The examples he gave rang true with me as I know a few exceptional people who fit into those categories where traditional church attendance is unrealistic. More, which is disappointing, is knowing scores and scores in the church participating as if a social club, without being spirit led. Not to get hung up on the examples, because Barna did not, it just really stood out to me.

From research, the local church has virtually no influence on culture. There are 7 cultural spheres of influence including movies, music, tv, Internet, books and family. I think it's great when we have solid Christians enter these arenas to have influence. If we all went every Sunday morning, night and Wednesday evening and missed out on other developments that The Lord may have for us to be an influence, how tragic! However, many vibrant and gospel-preaching churches save, build and revitalize families - so do not discount the local church. What I took away from this was that for the average person, they need to be involved in a gospel preaching church for growth, but not everyone would fit that model. We need to sway away from legalism. Keep our eyes open for what God has for us and engage the culture. If what the church has been doing the past 30 years has been ineffective, many in church leadership across the US have a great opportunity here to ask themselves some pretty hard questions.

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### **Sarah says**

Wow! This book was awesome. If anyone asked me to hand them a book about where I am spiritually, I would give them a copy of this book. This book so describes me and my family. It was encouraging and reignited my passion to live for God, no matter the cost. I am a revolutionary!

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### **Joshua says**

George Barna is an inconsistent archer. Or at least that's why I thought after reading only a third of the book.

I was surprised seeing that Barna wrote this book as it looked different than many of his statistically heavy

books I've read (or skimmed) in the past. After reading the first several chapters of Revolution, I was slightly disappointed.

Barna describes a new "revolution" of Christians who are becoming the church and not having the church define their Christianity. And although this book related to me personally and defined things I've been feeling for the past 10 years, I felt his definitions and descriptions were a bit vague and empty.

But then I read the rest of the book.

I believe his vagueness was almost intentional. He painted a large concept in which he filled in much of the details later on. By the end of the book, his definitions were extremely well thought-out and incredibly spot-on. Also, in a typical Barna style, he gives some statistics of the present and some predictions of the future. And since Barna is typically accurate in these matters, I believe that this is an important read for pastors and Christians everywhere.

This book struck an emotional chord in me. Having many of these revolution concepts free-roaming my head for many years, the fact that Barna was able to define them and teach me what to do with them, to me, this book was priceless. For this reason alone, I give it 5 stars.

However, there will be quite a few who will read this book who will understandably not share my same positive outlook. Those with more of a traditional mindset will most likely have a hard time with this book. And Barna makes it clear that this is understandable and okay. Others who typically judge a book to soon might share my same initial problem. My only advice is to keep an open mind and read the book's contents in its entirety. It's a quick read and not terribly hard on the brain.

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### **Lane Douglas says**

In "Revolution," Barna investigates the growing reality that more and more people are seeking alternative ways to grow deeper in Christ. Not content to stick with the traditional model of the local church service on Sunday mornings, these "revolutionaries," as Barna calls them, are turning to house-church, cyber-church, and family-church strategies.[return][return]As with any revolution, Barna's book is bound to meet with controversy. The very fact that he named his book by this title shows he is expecting it. A revolution is never peaceful since it involves the tension between a younger generation seeking a new and fresh alternative to the traditions that an older generation tries vehemently to protect.[return][return]Barna's book is, by my account, a good one. He is not, as one writer to Charisma magazine put it, trying to tell people to leave the local church. In fact, Barna writes "The Revolution is not about eliminating, dismissing, or disparaging the local church. It is about building relationships, commitments, processes, and tools that enable us to be the God-lovers we were intended to be from the beginning of creation." Nor is Barna going contrary to the biblical call for Christ-followers to regularly assemble for mutual edification and worship to God. He is simply showing that there is more than one way to fulfill this command than the local brick-and-mortar building model we associate with the word "church." In his words, it is time we stop GOING TO church and start BEING the church.

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### **Rock Rockwell says**

The Beatles' song is better.

Barna's stats are good to show that the "corporate" church in the West will see a significant demise in attendance over the next 10-20 years and a revolution of people independent of rituals and religion will emerge. This is largely due to the church's non-relevance to today's culture, poor leadership, distrust in authority and religious polity, and a host of real problems that have plagued 'the church' over the years.

As much as the Scriptures teach that God wants his people's hearts to worship Him everywhere, Barna misses the abundance of Scriptures that support the local church, pastors, elders, deacons, Lord's table, baptism, breaking of bread, evangelism, etc. as another place GOD ORDAINED to worship and enjoy him collectively. Barna's Revolution of independent worshippers is impossible to do alone or with your buds at the golf course. "Christ loved the church and laid down His life for her" and we should do the same. Yeah, people in church screw it up many times - welcome to the world of sinners saved by grace - but all the great awakenings in the past were in conjunction with the local churches.

Revolution? I don't know. Maybe Paul McCartney knows. Either way, "He loves you, yeah, yeah, yeah!"

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### **Cindy Sims says**

#### **Thought provoking!**

Great read! Makes you think about where you are in your relationship with Christ. Would recommend for anyone asking questions about the Church.

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### **Jeff says**

Discernment! While there are some good spots of info here and there in this book, what the author is missing "Is" Church. There are so many places in the bible that talks about the "church" as people, as well as the "Church" as a building or place. I choose to hold this book up against The Word of God and follow Christ and His Word. I really don't think God would be leading a "Revolution" of people to leave Church, and not stick around a Make A Difference at the Church they seem to think is "not feeding them". That is just them setting a "standard" on what and where Jesus can work in their own life. Just imagine where God might be taking you on your Journey through listening to Him on a Journey at Church!

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### **Thomas Kinsfather says**

Even if Barna's approach is over-dramatic, his data and ability to read social trends is spot on. The institutionalized churches in the US are becoming less and less effective. Revolution attempts to examine experience, statistical data, and the Scriptures to discover why and what alternatives exist.

Jump to the End: In short, Revolution is Barna defending his decision to embrace home churches and more casual missional communities instead the the top-heavy, big buildinged, traditionalized, socially irrelevant institutionalized church. This is far from the best book on this topic, it serves as a good started to let those who love Jesus and are disenchanted with American "church" know that there is an alternative.

Suggested further reading: If Barna's thoughts resonate with you, as they did with me, keep reading. There are much better books out there than his. Alan Hirsch, Frank Viola, and weare3dm.com have all contributed to this conversation.

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## **Bart Breen says**

What's Going on with George Barna?

George Barna's "Revolution" is now almost 5 years old and in writing this review I realize that I am late to the party and further I realize that the discussion has progressed beyond this work in subsequent books published. Nevertheless, it remains an important and seminal work today both because of what it has to say and who is saying it.

George Barna is one of the most listened to voices in the organized and institutional church for the past 25 years. This is evidenced by the sale of his many books as well as the multitude of references to his books by other authors. He has been a featured speaker in many venues. His articles have appeared in almost every major contemporary journal and magazine. I know as a young pastor beginning in the late 1980's that it was almost impossible to have a meaningful discussion of the state of the church and the perceived needs and future of the local church without being aware of what George Barna had to say about the demographics and psychographics of North American society. Barna's research and insights combined with the Church Growth movement headed by C. Peter Wagner and John Wimber was foundational for churches and pastors of all bents and persuasions to practically prepare and respond to the emerging trends in society. Many churches used a lot of what Barna had to say to respond with marketing and programming within their local churches and even denominations to attempt to stay ahead of the curves that Barna was identifying as relevant. What is more, many of those efforts succeeded; at least by the measure of "butts in seats" and revenues to the church or organization that are typically cited and sought as practically necessary at an organizational level.

George Barna, however, equipped with the ability to observe and assess the changes that were taking place over time, ironically based in part on his input and counsel to churches, saw something that deeply disturbed him. These changes in numbers and revenues while encouraging to the immediate organizations experiencing them, were not in turn having much impact upon society. Measures of things like divorce and a biblical world view were statistically indistinguishable from society at large. Despite that fact that Barna had built a very successful business and presence upon the observations and counsel he had given and could continue to give without interruption, Barna did something that humanly makes little sense. Barna decided to ask the question of himself, if what he was doing was meaningful and right.

This lead him on a journey that cost him. His going to the New Testament to ask if the church structure and practice that his work was supporting was Biblical was counter-intuitive to many of his own best interests. Yet in doing so, he came to the conclusion that something was seriously, seriously wrong and what is more he could no longer directly contribute to the success of that system. He took his successful firm of over 100 employees and cut and restructured it to 8 employees and then began speaking out and writing about his observations.

Further, Barna became aware that far from being unique in his observations and concerns he was part of a large and growing group of people who felt the same way and were either leaving the institutional church or who had never been a part of it in the first place and were deliberate in their choice not to be, because they saw the institutional church in many regards, not as a neutral factor but one which would actually be negative



to their spiritual walk and growth. Further, when Barna applied the measures he had to the typical institutional church in comparison to society it became apparent that these "revolutionaries" were walking in a manner that made a difference in their own lives as well as the lives of those with whom they came in contact.

Revolution, is Barna's statement. More than that, it is his declaration of separation from that which had previously defined him. Not only is he speaking of the revolution, he is declaring himself to be a revolutionary.

That said about the author, the book itself is remarkably brief and targeted. A natural criticism from this, especially from those threatened by and reacting to what Barna has to say is that it is "too" brief and not documented "enough." However, this book is not simply an academic or theological treatise. It is more of a heart cry and explanation as to why this change has taken place.

Themes presented within the book include an examination of revolution as historically observed, as well as the reaction to the establishment. A definition of success by what God expects as opposed to what is humanly or socially feasible lays a foundation for additional interactions with what Barna observes of how the local church is doing, what transitions are taking place and what is taking place outside the context of the local church. Building upon these themes Barna presents the alternatives to traditional institutional churches that are emerging from these trends. Implicit within these observation and then explicitly tied in is strong speculation as to what parallels most strongly with the message and style of ministry that Jesus exemplified. The book then moves quickly to conclude with what the revolution looks like today and gives a good prediction of how some will respond to this message, including those who used to sing Barna's praises so effusively but now see him as a traitor and heretic for abandoning the cause of their institution.

However, lest this approach be seen as all negative, Barna makes some strong statements as to how local church can see and respond to these factors and in doing so, Barna reveals that while his heart has been moved in such a way that he has ceased formal association, he has neither abandoned those fellow revolutionaries who still remain and work within and through the local church.

Coming late to this party as I mention, I have the benefit as well of being able to see some developments since that time. In particular, the criticisms wielded against Barna as to his qualifications to speak to these issues. Surprisingly, some of those very people who used to sing Barna's praises and invite him to speak and write to their accolades, with the change in opinion have now decided that Barna is "just a market researcher" and not qualified to address these "weighty issues" of ecclesiology and theology. This despite the fact that in addition to Barna's extensive training in this area he is also trained at Dallas Theological Seminary.

For those however who have concerns and want to see in plainer language the ecclesiology and theology upon which much of this movement is built. Barna has coupled with Frank Viola in a subsequent book *Pagan Christianity?: Exploring the Roots of Our Church Practices* and then Viola goes on his own to write *Reimagining Church: Pursuing the Dream of Organic Christianity*. These stand in response to the charges that Barna is simply seeking to tear down and not build up. Those responding most vehemently appear to have confused the institutional church (little c) with the Church universal (big C) and to have presumed that God's plans and purposes can't be accomplished without their help or their model.

In conclusion, whether a reader agrees with all Barna has to say going into the book or coming out, Barna cannot be ignored. Those who listened so hard and so long to what he had to say to build the institution of the local church in the past, owe it to themselves to hear what he has to say now and why.

5 Stars. A must read!

Bart Breen

Additional books to read in this genre include: The Cost of Discipleship Roaring Lambs Truly the Community: Romans 12 and How to Be the Church Restoring the early church A New Kind of Christian: A Tale of Two Friends on a Spiritual Journey Christ and Culture (Torchbooks) Megashift: Igniting Spiritual Power Too Christian, Too Pagan: How to Love the World Without Falling For It Church in Emerging Culture: Five Perspectives Pagan Christianity?: Exploring the Roots of Our Church Practices Reimagining Church: Pursuing the Dream of Organic Christianity From Eternity to Here: Rediscovering the Ageless Purpose of God

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### **Deborah says**

Very through-provoking. Don't read if you are happy with the status quo.

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### **Ilona says**

Barna evaluates the current state of the local church, the people.

His findings are not anything new nor surprising parse, he just articulates the present times well and has research, statistics - gathered by surveys, to back it. A surge of people zealous for an intimate relationship with God are forced to leave the local church and be the Church instead.

As he stated the individual reasons for the walk out I found myself in much agreement with him, for I have seen it and cannot deny it. But he is incorrect as he places more weight on his stats over the Scriptures in his bold statements about the future state of the church. He encourages a type of revolutionary birth of individuals who will leave the institutionalized church behind and function well on their own but not completely on their own since they are commended to partake in some sort of fellowship. Anyway, because the man is highly respected and so is Brana group research, there is much merit given to what he has written.

The reality is that God has spoken much about the church from the very beginning, in His Word. When Barna refutes the importance of the church and states that it is abiblical not biblical he gives no such support nor addresses the many passages that address the church. Sure, the church should always look to Scripture and reform back to what it should be, sure, it is imperfect, and sure, it may not be 100% biblical. But that does not mean we are to forsake it, the local community of the fellowship of sinners. We are to love people, those who know and see this trend and understand it should help those in and out of the church develop a real love and zeal for our great God. Do not leave His people in the dump help them come out of it.

Like I said before there is much more emphasis on the local church in the Scriptures then there is on the catholic(universal)church.

Overall, the book helped me see things differently. Read it, but read it with caution.

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