

## ***Revolution: Finding Vibrant Faith beyond the Walls of the Sanctuary***

George Barna. (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 2005), 140 pages.  
Available through [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com) & other online stores

George Barna is a pollster with a well-established reputation for doing contract work for the US government and major corporations – looking at future trends in order to help them determine the nature of policies and business plans in a world where personalised consumerism is increasingly shaping the West. Following his successful work as a consultant, he has spent the last few years looking at what the church of tomorrow will look like in the US.

Based on his polling data, Barna projects that by 2025, only 35 per cent of American Christians will attend what we would call a local church (compared to 70 percent in 2000), while the rest will seek other ways to serve and worship God, using alternative, like-minded groups or through technology and the arts. Many of these, whom he calls *Revolutionaries*, care very little about the organised structure known as the local church, which has often rejected them. They prefer to use their passion for Christ to establish God's *Kingdom*. They are driven by a strong desire to come back to the New Testament roots of the Christian faith and serve as it was intended in the early days. They have created their own communities, using all kinds of media, to bring fellowship into their lives. They are lovers of this world who seek to transform it into what God wants it to be.

The book is not a personal testimony, but a brief summary of research done for

the benefit of the local church and for those who feel that the American church is unhealthy. At the same time, Barna says both that he himself does not want to miss the boat – this *revolution* – and that he wants to invite others to join in this massive and unavoidable change that is happening in the Church. By pulling together the outcomes of his interviews and by taking a fresh look at what the Bible says on the topic, he presents a portrait of the beliefs and passions of these Revolutionaries who are living their Christian lives largely apart from any local church.

Overall, this might be *bad news* for the local church, and Barna will likely get a fair amount of criticism for his conclusions. On the other hand, I did not see any alarmist statements or hidden agendas in his book. Having read quite a few books on postmodernism and related topics, I feel that *Revolution* is probably the most level-headed that I have read on the topic, because the core of the book simply presents the results of his research and is not a polemic. He wants to see local churches ready to face the coming changes, because they are simply unavoidable. While he realizes that many might disagree, he does not want churchgoers to be taken by surprise.

My only concern with the book is that it is sometimes hard to distinguish between the results of his research and his theological beliefs, especially when he describes the early church's understanding of service to Christ.

While I am unable to discuss how the trends discussed in this book relate to churches in the Arab world (mainly due to my own lack of experience in the region), there is no doubt that these trends will affect AWM as a Western organisation. We rely on local churches to send us workers and to fund our activities. We also have a core belief that the local church is a critical entity in the propagation of the gospel. If Barna is accurate in his predictions, by 2025 we will have access through local churches to only 35 per cent of the Christian population in the US, which is the major source of both our funding and workers.

If we want to survive as an organisation as these trends take hold, we will need to seriously review our core belief in the local

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church and see what the reshaped Church will look like, in order to attract the *unchurched* American Revolutionaries. We will need to look at ways to accommodate these Revolutionaries and offer them organizational structures they can be comfortable with. It is likely that issues like justice, the environment and poverty will be high on their agendas, along with a great desire to worship God in a holistic way. Being highly flexible in their understanding of what church looks like, they may bring new ways of gathering seekers and BMBs together that are quite different from the typical models currently used in the Arab world. In the same way that this will be a challenge for the American church, it will also be a challenge for AWM. I just hope that we will not miss the boat...

#### **reviewed by Yannick Bherer**

*Yannick, a French-Canadian, has served AWM in IT services in Worthing for the last four years. He is very interested in a Christian postmodern worldview, both intellectually and personally, as it significantly shapes his faith journey.*

### **Emerging Churches: Creating Christian Communities in Postmodern Cultures**

Eddie Gibbs and Ryan K. Bolger. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 345 pages.

In this volume of *Seedbed* we read of Paul-Gordon Chandler's suggestion that there are good models to be taken from the characteristics of *emerging churches* in the West that can be adapted into appropriate approaches to Muslims in the *East*. In anticipation of this *Seedbed*, and in order to get a better grasp on what 'emerging churches' are all about, I purchased and read *Emerging Churches: Creating Christian*

*Communities in Postmodern Cultures*, which is billed as 'The best book yet on the emerging church' (back cover). I am including this review in *Seedbed* in order to help readers understand more about the nature of the churches that are emerging in *missional response* to the postmodern cultural realities that are increasingly shaping Western societies. In addition, a look at emerging churches in