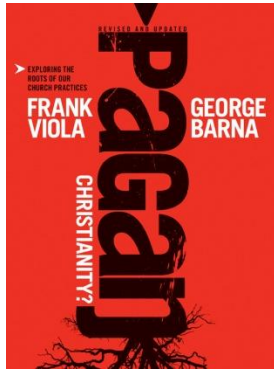


# A Reader's Guide to *Pagan Christianity?*

## *Exploring the Roots of our Church Practices*

As you read this book, we feel it is important that you understand how we are using the terms below.



### **Pagan**

We are using this word to indicate those practices and principles that are not Christian or biblical in origin. In some cases, we use it to refer to those ancients who followed the gods of the Roman Empire. We are not using the word as a synonym for bad, evil, sinful, or wrong. A “pagan practice or mind-set” refers to a practice or mode of thinking that has been adopted from the church’s surrounding culture. We believe that some pagan practices are neutral and can be redeemed for God’s glory. We feel that others stand in direct conflict with the teachings of Jesus and the apostles and thus cannot be redeemed.

### **Organic Church**

The term organic church does not refer to a particular model of church. (We believe that no perfect model exists.) Instead, we believe that the New Testament vision of church is organic. An organic church is a living, breathing, dynamic, mutually participatory, every-member functioning, Christ-centered, communal expression of the body of Christ. Note that our goal in this book is not to develop a full description of the organic church, but only to touch on it when necessary.

### **Institutional Church**

This term refers to a religious system (not a particular group of people). An institutional church is one that operates primarily as an organization that exists above, beyond, and independent of the members who populate it. It is constructed more on programs and rituals than on relationships. It is led by set-apart professionals (“ministers” or “clergy”) who are aided by volunteers (“laity”). We also use the terms contemporary church, traditional church, present-day church, and modern church to refer to the institutional church of our day.

### **New Testament Church, or First-Century Church**

These terms do not refer to a particular form of church. We are instead speaking of the church of century one that we read about in our New Testament. (In this book, first-century church is used as a synonym for New Testament church.) We do not advocate a primitivistic return to a particular model of the early church. Instead, we believe that a return to the spiritual principles, the organic practices, and the spirit and ethos of the first-century church, along with the teachings of Jesus and the apostles, should guide our practice of the church in our day and time.

### **Biblical, or Scriptural**

These words are used first and foremost as source statements and secondarily as value judgments. Biblical or scriptural refers to whether a practice has its origins in the New Testament Scriptures. References to unbiblical or unscriptural practices do not automatically imply error. These words can refer to the fact that a certain practice does not appear in the New Testament (in which case it should not be treated as sacred). But they can also refer to a practice that violates the principles or teachings of the New Testament. The context will determine how these words are used. We certainly do not agree with the doctrines of “the silence of Scripture” and “the regulative principle,” which teach that if a practice is not mentioned in the New Testament then we should not follow it.

We trust that understanding these definitions will lead you to greater understanding as you read this book.

➤ Frank Viola and George Barna, authors