



Exploring Christianity: Why Organized Religion?

iFOLLOW

Meeting with Jesus

The iFollow Discipleship Series

About the iFollow Discipleship Series Pastor's Edition

Categories

The iFollow Discipleship Series is designed to be used in congregations to assist people in their pursuit of God. This assumes that individuals are in unique places in their journey and there is no perfect set of lessons that everyone must complete to become a disciple—in fact discipleship is an eternal journey. Therefore the iFollow curriculum is a menu of milestones that an individual, small group, or even an entire church can choose from. The lessons can be placed in three general categories: **Meeting with Jesus** (does not assume a commitment to Jesus Christ); **Walking with Jesus** (assumes an acceptance of Jesus Christ); and **Working with Jesus** (assumes a desire to serve Jesus Christ).

Components

Each lesson has a presenter's manuscript which can be read word for word, but will be stronger if the presenter puts it in his/her own words and uses personal illustrations. The graphic slides can be played directly from the Pastor's DVD or customized and played from a computer. There are also several group activities and discussion questions to choose from as well as printable student handouts.

Usage

The lessons are designed to be used in small groups, pastor's Bible classes, prayer meetings, seminars, retreats, training sessions, discussion groups, and some lessons may be appropriate sermon outlines.

Credits

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Why Organized Religion?

This is material that can be used to create a presentation for people who have not yet come to a point in their spiritual journey where they have decided to become a follower of Jesus.

Learning Objectives

1. To discover objectively why a person would choose to attend church
2. To examine the strengths and weaknesses of organized religion
3. To understand the history of organized religion, mainly Christianity
4. To see what Jesus and the Bible say about organized religion

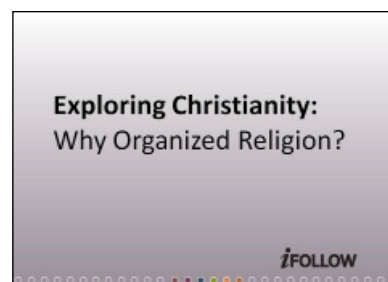
Content Outline

1. Intentional community: a place to belong
2. Society's fear of organized religion: what is our response?
3. Where did we come from: the roots of organized religion
4. Organized religion throughout the Bible
5. Jesus' criticism and support of organized religion
6. What does organized religion offer a modern believer?

Background Material for the Presenter

There is nothing that hurts a child more than being left out. There is no fear bigger for any child than to be on a playground with no one to play with. One of the first concepts a child learns is that of "me too!" A need for belonging is something basic inside each one of us. According to the Canadian Mental Health Association, a sense of belonging is one of a child's fundamental needs, and it must be cultivated to ensure a balanced and healthy experience outside the family. (Canadian Mental Health Association)

Our modern society in North America is moving away from our family and community oriented roots. It used to be that you could sit on your front porch and chat with your neighbors. You knew who they were, where they worked, who their extended family was and even their



schedule. They knew you, too, and you were a part of the neighborhood, which meant something. Your parents lived in the same town and your children saw their grandparents most days.

Now, knowing your neighbor is a rarity. Your neighbor moves away and you don't say goodbye because you never said hello. Grandparents live clear across the continent from their grandchildren. Our communication has moved from face-to-face over the fence to text messaging across the city and Email around the globe. There is no reason to get to know the people right next to you because you have continuous access to those far from you. Children grow up these days with cell phones, text messaging and emailing. They live in a world where predators don't have to find them in a schoolyard anymore; they find them on line when we think they are safe in their bedrooms.

So what community do we belong to today? There is the national community, the country to which we belong. We are American, Canadian, British or Ghanaian or Mexican, etc. There is the regional community, where we might identify ourselves as coming from the west coast, the prairies, the south, etc. There is the metropolitan community, where we might identify ourselves as from a particular city like Toronto or Cincinnati. We reside in a city neighborhood or a suburban town, each of which has a certain reputation or social standing or historic identity. But at the end of the day, we still don't know our neighbors. The need to belong to a community still exists, however. It is a powerful human urge. Ryan Messmore suggests that young adults are searching for a sense of community and place to belong and are turning to the government to fill that need, looking for programs and policies to create community instead of relying on natural association between neighbors and people who meet. (Messmore)

Children are searching to fill this need through online gaming and chat rooms where they can be a part of a social network. The dangers of these social networks are numerous, yet surprisingly a social networking survey revealed that 49 percent of children ages eight through 17 have an online profile. Compare that to the 22 percent of people age 16 and over who have online profiles, and you can see exactly where our society is headed. (Waters) Yet the online community that draws so many youngsters sometimes doesn't even introduce people using their real names, let alone the same physical room. There is still a distance.

Adults also look for communities to belong in. They increasingly identify themselves with the workplace instead of the home. When the majority of your day is spent at work, including overtime hours and weekend days spent at the office, is it any surprise that families are not as strong as they used to be? However, it is no longer financially feasible for many families to have one parent stay at home with the children. Two incomes are now the norm, and to keep up with an average standard of living, both parents work outside the home. Gone are the days when one income could cover the mortgage, the car and the raising of four or five children! So when the majority of an adult's time is spent in

the workplace, it is natural for them to identify themselves primarily in their professional role instead of primarily as a member of a family or a community.

One of the most successful businesses in North America today is Starbucks, the coffee company with a sense of community. Starbucks makes its money by creating franchises that look like little community coffee shops. The employees are encouraged to know their customer's favorite coffee. The décor encourages the patrons to sit and stay a while. Why would someone pay \$5 for a coffee? Because Starbucks doesn't only sell coffee, they sell a sense of community. Starbucks is making a mint because they figured out what people want most, somewhere to belong, not just a hot drink. (Starbucks)

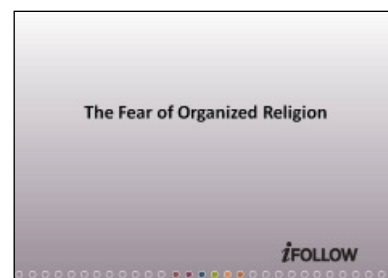
So what is left of the good old days of community, porch swings and a neighborly chat over the fence? Are we left with Starbucks, the trademarked corporation? No, there is one last vestige of times gone by. We still have the church. The church used to be center of social life in North America. People attended every week, and even midweek! It was where they met their friends and where they came together to help the less fortunate in their community. A person could be born into a church, get married there, bring one's children to be blessed and then be buried in the graveyard outside; their entire lives lived in one congregation. But haven't churches changed, too?

It is true that times change whether we like it or not. Even churches change. But while the times have changed and the methods used in some churches have changed, the church remains an intentional community. Members make an effort to get to know each other, even if they probably would never meet outside the church doors. An organized church might not be a spontaneous community, but it does offer the ties of community, a place to bring together people across social boundaries, where they can share their joys and sorrows, and where you can always find someone to help you move.

An intentional community is somewhere people can belong. They contribute their time and their skills to the unit as a whole, and it is when they are needed that they feel they truly belong. As was pointed out by José Ortega y Gasset, "people do not live together merely to be together. They live together to do something together." (Nisbet, p. 54) We all have the need to belong and to contribute. We all have the need to join in efforts to achieve common goals. The need for the church has not changed with the times. People have just forgotten that they need it!

The Fear of Organized Religion

Organized religion provokes a bad taste in the mouths of many people today. It is very common to hear people say these days, "I believe in God, I just don't believe in organized religion." Fifty years ago, that statement wouldn't have made sense. People saw God and the church as indelibly interwoven. Today, however, people have seen too



many abuses, fraudulent activity and hypocrisy in the church to trust the organization. A church touches the very softest parts of the human heart, and people refuse to trust their most sensitive feelings to an organization with the bad reputation it has developed. The fastest growing segment of religion in North America today is made up of people who believe in God but do not affiliate with any religion.

One of the main complaints society has with organized religion is the constant requests for money and the misuse of it. We are reminded of popular TV preachers who promise miracles for donations, claiming that God will see their hearts when they step out in faith with their checkbook, or more likely, their credit card. Faith healing events are held where the offering plates are passed many times during an emotional event. But the healing never seems to last and the handicapped and truly disabled are never allowed onto the platform to be “healed.” The preacher is a fraud whose main goal is to siphon money out of the pockets of believers. He lives a ridiculously affluent lifestyle with private jets, expensive clothing and jewelry, several mansions at his disposal, countless cars and high end hotel bills. Where does his money come from? From the pockets of the faithful, people who work two jobs, drive an old car and struggle to put clothing on their kids. Is it any surprise that the general public is skeptical of an organized faith?

How can we respond to this very valid fear? It is true that with any organization that money is needed to keep it afloat. There are people who dedicate their lives to the organization and depend on being paid to feed their families. There are faith-based charities, schools and similar ventures that must be funded. However, Ellen White writes of the church’s role in society, “It is the purpose of God to glorify Himself in His people before the world. He expects those who bear the name of Christ to represent Him in thought, word, and deed. Their thoughts are to be pure and their words noble and uplifting, drawing those around them nearer the Saviour. The religion of Christ is to be interwoven with all that they do and say. Their every business transaction is to be fragrant with the presence of God.” (White 1948, p. 21) Truly, many Christian organizations have failed.

Another fear that society has is that of the cult. In recent years many cults have developed and good, well-meaning people have been duped into association with them. We are reminded of David Koresh in Waco, Texas. (Frontline) He led the Branch Davidians who believed that he was of the house of David and would bring about the apocalypse. David Koresh took many women away from their husbands into his harem. Some in his harem were as young as twelve. He preached at the people constantly, but did not follow his own teachings. He controlled every moment of their days until many of them died in a shooting standoff with the authorities in 1993. There have been cults before and since, and people are afraid of little-known religious organizations, afraid of being controlled and manipulated into something evil and frightening.

While most religious organizations do not use the mind control techniques employed by cults, society is still afraid of being duped into becoming one of the victims. No one wants to be fooled and the characteristics of people who are susceptible to cults make people wary. For example: dependency, unassertiveness, gullibility, low tolerance for ambiguo-

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ity, cultural disillusionment, naïve idealism, desire for spiritual meaning, susceptibility to trance-like states and ignorance of the ways in which groups can manipulate individuals. Because the people are taken advantage of again and again, many people begin to see faith as naïve idealism or gullibility. A desire to find truth in the Bible is often associated with a low tolerance for ambiguity. Because organized religion is associated with the duped, the victimized, the gullible, etc., it is particularly unattractive to the more educated, intelligent people in society.

How can we respond to those who fear we are a cult? White warns, “Let God’s people act so that the world will see that Seventh-day Adventists are an intelligent, thinking people, whose faith is based on a surer foundation than the bedlam of confusion. The people are hungry for the bread of life. Do not offer them a stone.” (White, 1958, p. 24) Our faith is not based on emotion or tradition, but on careful Bible study and well-reasoned theology.

Many religious organizations make the claim that only members of their group will be saved. From an outsider’s perspective, this is ridiculous. How can all of the organizations be right? How could a loving God exclude well-meaning, faithful Christians of a different stripe?

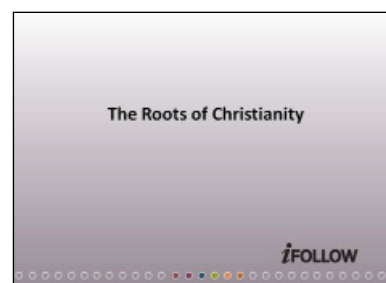
Our church has never claimed that. The truth of the matter is that people do not need to be baptized into the Seventh-day Adventist Church to be saved. Nowhere in the Bible does it say that. Salvation is based in a relationship with Christ not membership in a particular organization. When churches insinuate that their particular denomination is the only way to Heaven, a thinking, logical non-believer will be put off. In fact, many believers are put off by the same ideas!

There are many valid reasons why people avoid organized religion, and it is the mission of the church to show our society that we are different, that we don’t take advantage of people and we do not seek to control anyone. Our neighbors and friends have logical reasons for avoiding religion, and only if we can approach them with sensitivity, humility and a willingness to listen do we have any chance to overcome these attitudes.

The Roots of Christianity

Christianity began with Jesus. We could argue that it began with Jesus’ mission on earth, or that it began at Pentecost when the Spirit came to the apostles, but the fact remains that Christians are followers of Christ. It started off as a small movement that grew exponentially. Roman emperors tried to wipe it out in several waves of persecution, but early in the fourth century, the emperor Constantine converted to Christianity and declared it the official religion of Rome.

According to some, this was the end of the pure faith because the church became



entwined with civil politics and concessions were made to pagan traditions. Regardless, this did stop the persecution of the Christians and allowed them a time of peace.

In the second century, Marcion proposed that the God of the Old Testament was not the same God that Jesus called Father. In fact, he proposed that the Old Testament be discarded and that only a few of the New Testament books be accepted as Scripture. This caused a large amount of debate and it pushed the church to decide upon a canon of Scripture or definition of what writings make up the Bible. The New Testament canon as we know it developed over a few hundred years of debate. By 400 A.D., the canon became what it is today. The Council of Nicaea in 325 A.D. decided on a statement of basic Christian doctrine, such as Jesus being both divine and the Son of God.

The Bishop of Rome became the most influential Christian leader from that point onward. The Christian church gained power, but also corruption and traditions not in the Bible. The eastern churches and the western churches held different philosophies, and in 1054 AD Pope Leo IX excommunicated the patriarch of Constantinople, the leader of the Eastern church. The patriarch, in turn, spoke against Pope Leo IX, and the church was officially divided into the Roman Catholic and the Eastern Orthodox segments.

In the 1400's, a growing number of radical thinkers saw the corruption in the church and wanted to do something to reform the church. They wanted to strip away all the traditions and customs like purgatory and the worship of saints, and return to the faith of the Bible. They also began to translate the Bible in the languages of the common people. Some of the more recognizable names are John Wycliffe, Jan Huss, John Calvin and Martin Luther, who put his 95 Theses on the door of a university church in 1517, sparking a wave of interest in Reformation.

If it weren't for the Reformers organized religion, at least in Europe and North America, would look very different today. They gave birth to the Protestant church, organized religion based on liberty of conscience and the provision of many choices of different kinds of churches.

In the 1600s, Protestants and Catholics established churches in North America and new concepts of religious freedom emerged. The Protestant faith was continually changing as new revival preachers took their stands on new doctrines. John Wesley founded the Methodists. John Calvin established Presbyterianism and his follower, George Whitefield, arrived in the New World colonies with very successful revival sermons. There were Baptists, Lutherans, Quakers and Dutch Reformed. Since that time organized religion in North America has continued to compete, create new denominations and merge existing ones. It often behaves more like American business corporations than the first Christian communities described in the Book of Acts.

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Organized Religion in the Bible

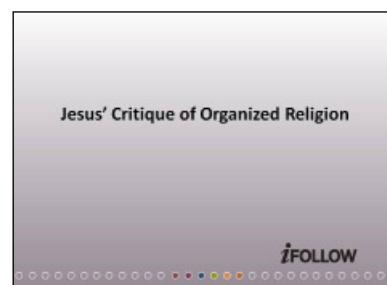
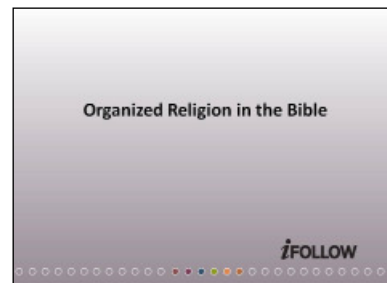
When did organized religion begin? In the Old Testament religion was embedded in ethnic and tribal culture. Each culture had their god or gods and believed that their gods were involved in their wars of conquest. The one God asserted in the Old Testament was associated with the Hebrew people from which Judaism, Christianity and Islam later emerged. It was God's intention that His people be a missionary people and bring the nations to know Him, but they largely failed at this mission. In this context God came in the incarnation of Jesus Christ, to create a new era of faith.

The new Jesus movement opened religion to all tribes, cultures and ethnic groups. The Christian faith took the concrete form of the household-based symposia or assemblies—private associations—that were well known throughout the Roman Empire but may have originated in Greek society where democracy was also invented. Then when the Emperor Constantine made Christianity the official religion of the Empire, it adopted the forms of government with bishops presiding over metropolitan areas parallel to the many princes and city-states. The oldest branches of Christianity still preserve organizational forms from the medieval period of European history. The Protestant denominations have been largely shaped after the corporations that came about with later free market economics and republican forms of government.

Jesus' Critique of Organized Religion

Jesus was a Jew and His experience of religion is in the context of the later stages of tribal or ethnic organization. The Jewish faith of His time was badly split. The ruling class that controlled the temple in Jerusalem had made a number of political compromises with the Roman overlords in order to preserve some autonomy for the faith. Dissident groups were widespread among the people. Among the original twelve disciples of Jesus was at least one Zealot, an underground movement that on several occasions sparked armed conflict with the Romans. (This eventually resulted in two devastating wars about 35 and 85 years after Christ. The first saw the destruction of the temple and the second resulted in the Jewish people being expelled from Judea.)

Many of Jesus' disciples were evidently Pharisees, a conservative movement that sought to protect the religious heritage of Judaism from contamination by the surrounding cultures. In their efforts to "build a hedge around the law of God," more and more emphasis was being put on the man-made rules, and hypocritical standards. The Pharisees judged



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the common people very harshly. Sickness was condemned as God's judgment on sin and the righteous were encouraged to make a great show of religion while trampling on the poor and suffering. It was in this context that Jesus, the Son of God, came into the world.

Jesus was not born into a wealthy or religiously elite family. His father taught Him the art of carpentry. Jesus worked with His hands and was poor. However, from a very young age, Jesus felt comfortable in the presence of the religious elite and was able to discuss religion with the highly educated. At twelve years old, when Jesus' parents lost Him in the crush of Jerusalem's crowds, they found Him "in the temple courts, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. Everyone who heard Him was amazed at His understanding and His answers." (Luke 2:46-47)

Jesus did not attack organized religion, but He did clearly establish His place outside the dominant religion of His time. The Pharisees attacked Him for eating with sinners, associating with the hated tax-collectors and allowing women of ill repute to touch Him. They particularly objected to His approach to observing the Sabbath which ignored their strict rules and focused on the notion that God made the Sabbath for humanity. They watched Him constantly to find His infractions of their laws. He had to remind them very sternly that "If you had known what these words mean, 'I desire mercy not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the innocent. For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath." (Matt 12:7,8) They did not recognize their God in human form, and they did not remember the nature of God. God's law that was meant to bring them rest and a closer relationship with the Divine, was misinterpreted to make it a crime to help the poor or heal the sick on the holy day. The Sabbath, that had been created in the beginning to be a blessing to the people, a day of rest and communion with their God, had turned into a day burdened down with so many rules and obligations that the people could no longer see the beauty of God in the day.

Jesus could be very critical of the religious elite. He pointed out their hypocritical actions and ideas and contrasted them with God's will to help their fellow man and love each other. In fact, His criticism could get incredibly powerful, telling them directly, "You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desire." (John 8:44) He directly criticized the religious leaders, saying, "Woe to you, for you are like unmarked graves which men walk over without knowing it." (Luke 11:44) They thought of themselves as important, superior and favored of God, but they had fallen so far away from God's will that they were, in fact, in direct opposition to Him.

However, despite Jesus' strong criticism of the leadership and individuals who had so polluted God's ways, Jesus was supportive of the essentials of the Jewish religious structure. When He was found in the temple as a child, and His parents questioned Him, and He responded, "Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?" (Luke 2:49) His righteous indignation was roused when He saw the misuse of the temple, being used as a marketplace instead of as a holy place of worship. He made a whip, turned over tables, scattered money and shouted, "How dare you turn my Father's house into a market!"

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(John 2:16) Despite the corruption within the temple, Jesus respected and defended the institution. His aim was not to ignore it or destroy it, but to purify it. He said, “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have come to fulfill them. I tell you the truth, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished.” (Matt 5:17, 18)

Organized religion was established in God’s eyes to improve human life, to point humanity to the promise of a Savior and to teach essential truths. Jesus attended the feasts, worshipped at the temple and followed the basic Law of God. Jesus simply brought their perspective back to the loving God that religion was meant to convey, showing them the original purpose of religion; to worship God and to help humanity.

What Does Organized Religion Offer Today?

One Adventist pastor, puzzling over the widespread negative attitudes toward organized religion in our world today suggests that we offer them “disorganized religion.” In other words, for those potential believers who cannot come to terms with the “big business” type of religion perhaps we should use informal, small groups, café churches and similar grass-roots communities. The Catholic Church has experienced an almost Protestant style of renewal in some countries in Latin America through the use of “base communities.” The Seventh-day Adventist Church in North America has a Simple Church Project which starts small congregations (average size; 10 adults) that meet in homes or other available locations and function very informally. Complexity of organization is not necessarily a sign of strong faith, so maybe the best approach is “don’t fight it; join them.”



Nonetheless there are, on reflection, some assets associated with organized religion that may be useful. Here is a brief description of several items that may fall into that category:

1. Organized religion provides the resources necessary to serve communities and internationally. When an earthquake kills hundreds of thousands in Haiti or a hurricane devastates New Orleans and the Gulf coast of the U.S., it is the relief organizations of large religious entities—World Vision, ADRA, United Methodist Committee on Relief, Catholic Charities, etc.—that end up doing the most good. The United Nations and various governments, including the local governments, can do certain things, but nothing is better at meeting the survivors where they are and providing immediate, practical assistance than the agencies created by large denominations and parachurch ministries. Only a constituency as broad as a major denomination can consistently mobilize the resources, provide the large numbers of trained personnel and the on-the-ground relationships necessary to do this work.
2. Organized religion provides large churches that meet the needs of suburban families and inner city neighborhoods. It is a myth that most megachurches are independent

congregations. In fact, recent research has shown that the majority of megachurches are affiliated with a denomination. And the independent megachurches are, most of them, affiliated with a support organization such as the Vineyard or the Willow Creek Association. (Thumma and Davis)

3. Organized religion provides many smaller congregations that meet the needs of young adults, senior citizens and small towns. New generations today seem to prefer smaller churches in urban neighborhoods and other communities. Senior citizens generally get better care in small congregations that often become their extended family. Even the smallest towns in North America are served by one or more churches when all the other entities of civilization have deserted them. These small churches are kept alive by the large denominational structures that support them. For example, in the Adventist Church in North America, the small churches are subsidized from the tithe of the large churches. Even if in a three-church district the amount of tithe turned in by those three churches does not cover the actual cost of their pastor, tithe from the college church or the largest church in the conference keep them from becoming an eight-church district.

4. Networks to share ideas and information. Organized religion fosters all kinds of networks that support a wide variety of special needs and specific ministries. Someone who is skeptical of organized religion will probably say at this point, “Well, there can be all kinds of networks without organized religion.” OK, but that means she has one foot in the boat. Are these networks not organized religion? They may be non-bureaucratic, low-cost structures, but they are structures nonetheless. Organized religion is often informal and low-budget in nature.

5. Organized religion can provide a variety of structures from those that have only the most distant connection to the large, corporation-style denominations to those that have a long history at the heart of denominational traditions. Organized religion has the capacity to meet a wide spectrum of needs. A “one size fits all” approach is bound to fail in today’s world. The growing religions are those that foster more variety. Large religious organizations have the ability to offer that variety. Some of the café churches and community-based groups associated with organized religion are seen by most of their local participants as entirely informal, independent groups. Yet the allegiances and resources that the sponsoring denomination, invisible in the background, brings to the venture are really essential even if it is just the vision and experience of passionate church planters fostering postmodern church planting movements.

6. Organized religion has the capacity to form a visible national or international witness on significant issues. It is the vast resources of organized religion that can mobilize pressure to save the invisible refugees of Darfur or press for civil rights laws to protect African Americans in the 1950s and 1960s. Admittedly, it is difficult to create consensus and sometimes these movements over-reach into meddling with the private lives of nonbelievers, but organized religion has also done much good through the centuries, ending the

slave trade in the 19th century and colonialism in the 20th century, inventing the hospital and the university.

7. Large religious organizations provide accountability. Cults like the Branch Davidians permit a David Koresh to misbehave because there is no higher authority or outside source to say, “David, where does it say in the Bible that you can take the wives of your elders or have sex with 12-year-old girls?” Cults are dangerous because they are small, free-form and dominated by charismatic figures who are accountable to no one. Organized religion provides structures for objective evaluation of leadership, intervention in unhealthy situations, and a balance of power. Completely privatized religion is the most dangerous kind when it comes to abuses even if the abusers hiding in the largest denominations get the most attention from the media.

8. Organized religion provides a community of well-educated scholars that bring the best study and thinking to issues of faith. Throughout history wild, new religious ideas have swept through various civilizations. Some of these turned out to be excellent innovations that we praise God for today. Others resulted in untold cruelty and stupidity. Some scholars believe that the early civilizations of Central America that seem to have disappeared so rapidly despite advanced astronomy and vast economic networks (and perhaps many other advanced features we do not know about) did so because a new religious cult came along and destabilized the empire. The most effective guard against wild and dangerous new religious movements is a group of people prepared to ask challenging questions, to look beneath the surface and evaluate these ideas. Organized religion, by supporting seminaries and universities, paying for some of its brightest minds to get doctoral degrees, etc., is the bulwark that provides this safety feature which really benefits all of society.

None of this is necessary to salvation, but all of it adds much to the richness and depth of Christian faith. It provides the wide range of choices that are generally valued by North Americans today. Within organized religion there is a much deeper menu of possibilities than there is outside of it.

More important much of this structure is clearly within the purposes of God. It may not be your cup of tea, but it does meet the needs of others. It is the Holy Spirit, after all, that gifts people with vision and energy to organize, according to Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12 and Ephesians 4. To condemn it across the board is to condemn servants of Christ operating at the behest of the Holy Spirit.

Organized religion connects us to the history of faith. A family lineage is important to an individual's identity. Those who have been cut off from their lineage are excited to find clues to where they came from. This is the same for us as believers. There is a history of organized religion that helps to identify who we are and where we came from. The truth has been passed down from Adam, and we are privileged to share in the tradition and the enjoyment of the worship of our Maker. Even if our earthly family does not share

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our beliefs, we know that we have a spiritual family that does. We are part of Abraham's promise. We are part of the line of Adam. We belong.

Handout in this Package

1. Church History: A Timeline



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Series:
Meeting with
Jesus

Action Plan
& Presenter
Notes

Exploring
Christianity:
Why
Organized
Religion?

Additional Resources

- Henry, Sam (2000). *The Naked Truth About Cults*. Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association.
- Marshall, David (2004). *The Battle For the Bible*. Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association.
- Nisbet, Robert (1990). *The Quest for Community: A Study in the Ethics of Order and Freedom*. San Francisco: ICS Press.
- Thumma, Scott, Davis, Travis (2007). *Beyond Megachurch Myths*. San Francisco: Josse Bass.
- White, E. G. (1948). *Testimonies for the Church*, Volume 9. Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association.
- White, E. G. (1911). *The Great Controversy*. Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association.
- White, E. G. (1946). *Counsels to Writers and Editors*. Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing Association.
- White, E. G. (1958). *Selected Messages, Book 2*. Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing Association.

Articles

- Canadian Mental Health Association (n.d.). "Children and Self-Esteem." Published on the Web at: www.cmha.ca/BINS/content_page.asp?cid=2-29-68
- Frontline (n.d.). "Biography: David Koresh." Boston: WGBH Educational Foundation. Published on the Web at: <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/waco/da-vidkoresh.html>
- Messmore, Ryan (2007). "Longing for Belonging and the Lure of the State." The Heritage Foundation, August 20, 2007. Published on the Web at: www.heritage.org/Research/Thought/bg2063.cfm
- Starbucks (n.d.) Published on the Web at: starbucks.co.uk/en-GB/Social+Responsibility/Starbucks+in+your+Community.htm
- Waters, Darren (2008). "Children flock to social networks." BBC News, April 2, 2008. Available online at: news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/technology/7325019.stm

Discussion Questions

1. What other reasons “put people off” organized religion, and what is our response to these reasons?
2. How much responsibility falls to the individual member and how much falls to the church organization when fostering a sense of belonging within a congregation?
3. Ellen White writes of “new light” continually coming to God’s people. How, as an organized religion, do we accept new ideas, attitudes and truths? How flexible should we be about change?
4. With true and false religious organizations since ancient times, how do we know that we are staying true to God’s way? Is there any organization that is fully faithful to God’s original plans for our religious experience, or is that impossible today?
5. What did Jesus change, if anything, about organized religion? What did Jesus mean when He said that “not one jot or tittle would pass away,” and how would this affect our worship?
6. What do you get, personally, from your organized religious experience?

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Group Activities

Purpose: To explore how a congregation is like a large family, in frustrating ways as well as supportive ways.

Preparation: Print or post a list of family members such as that given below. You will need enough tables for breakout groups of two or three individuals each and writing materials.

Assignment: Separate into groups of two or three. Assign each group a family member from the list. Each group should discuss what role in the church is most like that family member and in what ways. Then, bring the large group together again and have each breakout group present their conclusions to the whole group.

To make this more creative and fun, you might have the small groups act out their conclusions in a little skit along the line of the traditional game, Charades.

Debrief: After all of the small groups have reported, discuss conclusions and reactions. A church is often referred to as a family. In what ways are members like family members? If we see the connection between members of the church and literal family members, can we be more understanding and supportive of them?

Time: Allow five or ten minutes in the breakout groups to prepare. Once you bring the whole group together again, give two or three minutes for each report or skit. Allow at least 20 minutes for general discussion. The total time will be 45 minutes to an hour or more, depending on how many participants are involved.

Family Member List

Older brother	Cousins
Older sister	Step parent
Younger brother	Step brother or sister
Younger sister	Half brother or sister
Aunt or Uncle	In-laws
Grandmother or Grandfather	Parents
Son	Daughter

Example: Older Brother is like a deacon; he cleans up after you and is always there when you need a hand. A well established member can also be a bit inconsiderate like an older brother, not including the newer members in his activities and not understanding the newer members' needs.

Handout

Christian History: A Timeline

312 A.D.	Constantine is converted and later makes Christianity the religion of Rome
321	Constantine makes Sunday the official day of rest
325	First Council of Nicaea
690	Old English Bible translations
1095-1291	Crusades
1163	Notre Dame de Paris construction begins
1252	Pope Innocent IV authorizes the use of torture in the Inquisition
1380-82	John Wycliffe's Bible translated into Middle English
1414-1418	Council of Constance condemned John Wycliffe and Jan Hus
1431	Joan of Arc burned at the stake
1455	Gutenberg Bible, first printed Bible
1478	Spanish Inquisition
1508-1512	Michelangelo frescoes the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel
1517	95 Theses of Martin Luther
1521	Diet of Worms condemns Luther
1522	Luther's New Testament translation
1525	Anabaptist movement begins
1534	Henry VIII establishes the Church of England
1572	John Knox founds the Scottish Presbyterian church
1607	Jamestown, Virginia founded
1609	Baptist church founded by John Smyth
1611	King James Version is published
1648	George Fox founds the Quaker Movement

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1692	Salem witch trials in Colonial America
1738	Methodist movement started by John Wesley
1830	Mormonism founded by Joseph Smith
1832	Church of Christ organized
1844	October 22, The Great Disappointment (William Miller)
1861-63	Seventh-day Adventist Church officially organized
1865	William Booth founds Salvation Army
1879	Church of Christ, Scientist founded
1899	Gideons International founded
1931	Jehovah's Witnesses founded
1947	Dead Sea Scrolls discovered

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