



This article serves as an “on the other hand” perspective to Steve Crosby’s article “Nones and Dones,” which I affirm. I appreciate how he challenged caricatures and called churches to rigorous introspection. Thus, what follows is *not* a rebuttal—merely further thoughts inspired by his insights.

The *nones* and *dones* phenomenon is surely the most significant news story of American Christianity today. As Greg Albrecht has said, it is a huge tide washing ashore. Some of it is causing damage, while some of it is healing and

cleansing—and CWR/PTM has been part of that wave for at least ten years.

Many factors contribute to the current exodus from the institutional churches (IC) and from faith in Christ as well. CWR/PTM witnesses the

shallowness, irrelevance and corruption. Religious shenanigans that create wounded, angry and disillusioned spiritual orphans. They’re *done* with it—and should be.

On the other hand, to avoid

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wreckage all the time: good people traumatized by authoritarian control, spiritual abuse, religious striving, self-righteousness, judgmentalism, condemnation, legalism, moralism, exclusion,

reductionism or the charge of “church-bashing,” I will attempt to further nuance the discussion.

1. Let us admit that not all nones leave because of spiritual abuse.

Reasons for this *none* and *done* trend usually give the *noness*' point of view. This leaves such studies with blind spots. The solution is *not* to blame the *noness*, but neither is it wise to leave their reasons unexamined or incomplete. Other factors for the exodus include:

a. Radical individualism in our culture: The church often feeds the very individualism that kills it. Churches have so emphasized "freedom in Christ" and "personal relationship" that it can only encourage an "I, me, mine" spiritual narcissism. "Was I moved? Did the message feed me?"

And when churches do finally teach about a "greater good," it's largely focused on its own good—its growth and projects. Critical thinkers see through it as self-serving. Yes, some ministries thrive when they help their members see the bigger world. But if global concerns don't require churchgoing (or even compete with it)—why bother?

b. Radical consumerism in our culture: Churches that buy into the consumer culture try to market attendance by being relevant and entertaining: "We have great worship, great preaching, great programs. Come to our show!" Attendees buy in—until they realize the entertainment is better elsewhere. Those who drink the Kool-Aid of religious entertainment inevitably abandon it for something more titillating. Or better, they realize Christianity shouldn't have been a show to begin with, so they pursue something

more nourishing. And again, rightly so.

c. Freedom from attendance taboos: Did you know it used to be illegal to skip church? Then it became legal but still socially unacceptable—a religious taboo. But when the taboo is lifted, attendance becomes truly voluntary (finally!). Within one generation, we've watched those who are free not to go stop going. And this is important: *they don't need a reason*. Sadly, some feel the old

culture and conditions for the exodus.

2. Don't assume that either churchgoers or *noness* are Christ-less or Christ-centered.

a. Many churchgoers and leaders are faithful Christ-followers: We mustn't paint all churchgoers with the same brush as spiritual charlatans. Healthy faith communities are often the first harbor and hospital for religious refugees. And as spiritually anemic as many churches may seem, most Christians are just trying

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religious compulsion to give one—to justify themselves. They may even contrive a sad tale of religious oppression when in reality, they were merely bored, offended or didn't get their way.

In all these cases, note: the IC itself created the context,

to love God, each other and their community in their own humble ways. Churchgoing doesn't automatically make them religious.

b. Some *noness* leave because they are too religious to stay; some *noness* are still religious: judgmental, condemning and

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accusatory. Unable to coexist with their siblings in Christ, they leave, slamming the door, and badmouth other believers. Some even leave because their church was not religious *enough* for them—their pastors were too “soft on sin” and inclusive of sinners. In such cases, leaving church doesn’t automatically make *nones* less religious.

c. Some who self-identify as victims belittle the real victims we seek to reach: I have worked with many victims of truly devastating abuse—spiritual, sexual and physical. I find it belittling of their experience when others “play the victim” in a drama of their own making and then claim “abuse.”

“How did the church abuse you?” “Pastor didn’t visit me enough. I didn’t like the changes. The music was too ____ [fill in the blank].” No, sorry. That’s not abuse.

3. How I see it: One body, two ditches.

a. The church is one body: The body analogy comes to us via Paul (1 Corinthians 12). Paul describes the bodily unity of diverse parts. He warns the Church (both churchgoers and *nones*) not to condemn or exclude each other. We are one; we need each other.

The term “Body” also implies our material and corporate activity in the world, versus a ghostly or abstract existence.

The Body is not actually a building or organization: it is people coming together (*ekklesia*) to experience and mediate Christ’s loving presence into the world—to be the voice and hands of Good News.

b. The church is headed down one road: The road I see has two lanes. IC “churchgoers” may take one lane and *nones* may travel in the other, but as fellow Christ-followers, we journey together on the Jesus Way.

But the road also features two ditches. In one ditch I see a

soulless body (Christ-less congregations).

In the other lies a bodiless soul (Christ-less *nones*). To be a *living* body—the Christ-centered Church—we need both parties, we need Christ and we need to stay out of either ditch.

Most *nones* will never return to IC congregations. What matters is how they return to *being* Church—functioning as and in the universal Body of Christ. Our hope is that CWR/PTM models and facilitates the pursuit of Christ-centered faith. □

