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**Subject:** Responses to "The 'Out-of-Church' Christians."

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Dear Saints

We are still receiving responses concerning Andrew Strom's book on "The 'Out-of-Church' Christians" which we had published earlier this year on this network.

We considered the publishing of this book a calculated risk, and the responses (and reACtions!) did not disappoint. Some people flooded us with grateful responses, while some reacted with anger and with dismay. In between these extremes, we received the usual "concerned" replies, and even rebukes.

The "grateful ones" were generally relieved that at last the "unsayable" had been publicly said. I was surprised by the vast number of persons from different types of ministry backgrounds who had responded extremely positively, whether by e-mail, telephone or personal conversation. Many brought their own testimonies, ranging from calculated problem solving to deep hurt. Especially amongst prophetic folk I picked up a strong sense of excitedness and eagerness towards a pending new move of God.

On the negative side, concern about the effects of the debate on Church unity was the most frequent objection. Some openly incriminated the author (Andrew Strom), as well as our wisdom to publish the material. The subject even featured on a local Christian Radio station! The material definitely caused a stirring in the church community. As was to be expected, many traditional "church people" responded with fear. Unfortunately, it seems like some had only read the first chapter or so (of Andrew Strom's book), and had completely missed his "tidying up" of the problem in the last chapters.

I am grateful that the subject had, and is still causing, serious debate. Constructive debate should never harm - but only benefit. There are certain facts which we cannot ignore. If we do, we risk sinking into an immature state of denial.

Fact 1: About 20% (and growing) of all Christians world-wide are currently 'Out-of-Church.' They have been running with the Church System, some for decades on end, and have finally found it wanting. And they've opted out. In the USA, a staggering 93% of these Christians are former leaders in lay ministry (some are even former pastors)! It seems as if shortcomings in the Church cause its very leaders (who have to contend with these) to leave - when they realise they cannot change them.

Fact 2: The Institutionalised Church is doing very little, bordering on nothing, to get these Christians back into fellowship. Instead, they are being accused of rebelliousness, backsliding and similar epithets. This viewpoint seems to justify the Institutionalised Church's own position, but does little to better the situation.

Fact 3: Some parts of the Institutionalised Church puts pressure on, and tries to silence those who make these facts public. I can personally testify to this! Regardless what the motive behind these efforts are - they ultimately cause a filter-effect and control over the information that can reach believers.

(Just for the record: This ministry is properly submitted to, and loyal to its own local church "covering.")

Watch this space. It's going to get even more interesting!

In Christ

Eben Swart