

REIMAGINING AND REMAPPING THE RELIGIOUS LANDSCAPE:

Chaos Before a New Ordering

by Gil Rendle

What if the decline of the church isn't the whole story? What if the chaos we see is actually the beginning of a new ordering of religious life?

That is the central claim Gil Rendle makes in his newest work, *Reimagining and Remapping the Religious Landscape: Chaos Before a New Ordering*. Rather than focusing narrowly on attendance charts and membership rolls, Rendle invites us to step back and ask a deeper question: where are people actually finding meaning, belonging, and purpose today? When we change the lens from congregational survival to human meaning-making, the religious landscape looks far more alive—and far more complex—than many assume.

Rendle sketches a map with two simple axes: sacred vs. non-sacred space, and tightly structured institutions vs. free-form movements. On this terrain, he locates everything from traditional congregations to emerging spiritual experiments. Familiar churches remain—but they are joined by megachurches that function like staff-driven organizations, neighborhood congregations embedded in their local contexts, invisible immigrant churches, and even corporate chaplaincies. Beyond them lie “desire paths” and “unbundled” experiences where people stitch together spiritual practices from yoga studios, fitness communities, justice movements, or online groups.

The new map includes:

- **Unbundling:** people remixing community, ritual, justice, and transformation across multiple settings instead of relying on one congregation.
- **Movements:** from 12-Step groups to Black Lives Matter to the Taylor Swift Eras Tour, collective experiences that provide story, ritual, and belonging.
- **Entrepreneurs:** faith-driven innovators building community through housing, food security, neighborhood cafés, and digital platforms.
- **Refugia:** small, safe places—friendship groups, house churches, online communities—where faith quietly roots itself amid chaos.

For pastors, Rendle's insights land close to home: traditional voluntary-association models are fragile; larger churches are learning to staff up; neighborhoods are once again the primary unit of change; and leaders must clearly articulate their Christian identity in a culture where faith is easily fused with politics or consumerism.

The most hopeful message is that God is not absent in the chaos. New forms of meaning-making are bubbling up everywhere, even if they don't look like church as we've known it. Our task is not to shore up the old maps, but to pay attention to the new terrain, nurture small refuges of renewal, and experiment boldly for the sake of the gospel.

Presented by



Discussion Prompts for Leaders



1. Where do you already see “desire paths” in your community—unofficial routes where people pursue meaning outside church walls?
2. Which unbundled theme—community, transformation, justice, creativity, purpose, accountability—does your congregation embody best? Which might you grow into?
3. What local entrepreneurs or invisible ministries could your church bless or partner with?
4. What “refugia” could you nurture: a small, safe space for faith to root and renew in your context?
5. How would you describe your church’s Christian identity in a way that is clear, compelling, and distinct from political or cultural labels?



Read the full
monograph