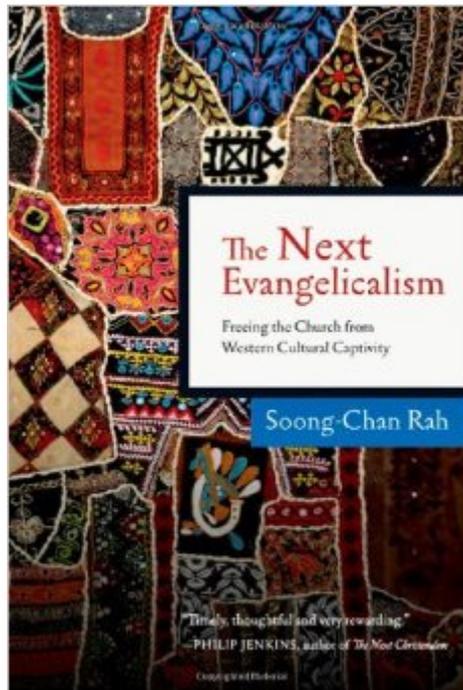


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The Next Evangelicalism: Freeing The Church From Western Cultural Captivity



Synopsis

2010 Golden Canon Leadership Book Award winner! The future is now. Philip Jenkins has chronicled how the next Christendom has shifted away from the Western church toward the global South and East. Likewise, changing demographics mean that North American society will accelerate its diversity in terms of race, ethnicity and culture. But evangelicalism has long been held captive by its predominantly white cultural identity and history. In this book professor and pastor Soong-Chan Rah calls the North American church to escape its captivity to Western cultural trappings and to embrace a new evangelicalism that is diverse and multiethnic. Rah brings keen analysis to the limitations of American Christianity and shows how captivity to Western individualism and materialism has played itself out in megachurches and emergent churches alike. Many white churches are in crisis and ill-equipped to minister to new cultural realities, but immigrant, ethnic and multiethnic churches are succeeding and flourishing. This prophetic report casts a vision for a dynamic evangelicalism that fully embodies the cultural realities of the twenty-first century. Spiritual renewal is happening within the North American church, from corners and margins not always noticed by those in the center. Come, discover the vitality of the next evangelicalism.

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Customer Reviews

While reading *The Next Evangelicalism* by Soong-Chan Rah, my emotions went through three stages: anger, acceptance, and ambivalence. First, anger: The thesis of Rah's book is that the evangelical church in America must be liberated from its "Western, white cultural captivity" and

replaced by "the next evangelicalism," which is multicultural. According to Rah, Western, white culture is individualistic, consumerist, materialistic, and racist. And it pervades Anglo evangelicalism, both in America and wherever Anglo evangelical influence has spread. The Anglo evangelical church focuses on buildings, bucks, and butts in the pew rather than on the holistic, transformative power of the gospel. To be perfectly frank, as a middle-aged, American, white male, I was none too pleased to see my church, my country, and my culture run down in this way. Then again, as a pastor, I'm used to taking vociferous criticism in stride. I always try to hear the truth behind my critics' words, not matter how much they're making me angry. And that brings me to the second stage my emotions ran through: acceptance. No matter how hard I tried, I couldn't escape the conclusion that Rah--to a significant degree--is right. The American evangelical church is declining, or at least its Anglo component is. David T. Olson documents this fact in *The American Church in Crisis*. But as Rah points out, the non-Anglo component of the American evangelical church is thriving. This is true in my own denomination, the Assemblies of God. Our anemic growth as a denomination is largely explained by the explosive growth of the Hispanic churches within our denomination.

At the risk of sounding overly harsh, I feel compelled to counterbalance the glowing recommendations this book has received from Philip Jenkins and Scot McKnight (whom I admire) and many others, including the thoughtful and concerned readers who posted positive reviews on .Rah's contention is that the western Church needs to be rescued from its "white cultural captivity" in three key areas: individualism, materialism and racism. This is a serious and important topic. For the record, I am a white evangelical Protestant (formerly Roman Catholic) with mostly conservative views on political and social issues. But I try very hard to listen respectfully to believers whose theological and political leanings differ from mine. It is my present opinion that the modern evangelical emphasis on having "a personal relationship with Jesus," when combined with American individualism and our consumer-oriented culture, has produced a hyper-individualized religion that bears little resemblance to the gospel of the kingdom as proclaimed by Jesus and the apostles. I've grown weary of hearing Christianity denounced as the religion of "rich white men." (Recently I witnessed an intelligent university student claim with a straight face that the Bible was written by rich white men.) I believe that the gospel of Christ is the one true antidote to hostility and divisions. Thus it pains me that American churches have been utterly ineffective at knocking down barriers of race, ethnicity and social class, and the current divisions in the body of Christ along racial, denominational and political lines are sinful and scandalous.

This book was prominently featured in the marketing materials of a suburban Chicago "pan-Asian multi-cultural" evangelical church. I wasn't sure what "pan-Asian multi-cultural" evangelicalism was, so I decided to check out the book. I was interested in learning more about the guy who is apparently at the center of this nascent movement (whose foothold, ironically, is in the posh northern 'burbs of Chicago). In general, I cannot quibble with the main points of the book. No objective observer can deny that, broadly speaking, American evangelicalism is too individualistic, too materialistic, and too culturally homogeneous. But is this really a novel criticism? Roman Catholics have been offering the identical criticism for more than two centuries. In fact, Rah's criticism merely echoes the warnings proffered by Old Side Presbyterians, who, in the 1740s, questioned the merits of the revivalist (i.e., evangelical) impulse of the times. So, Rah's observations, while reasonably correct, are nothing new. The apparent novelty of Rah's thesis is the notion that this is all the fault of white people. Yet Rah doesn't seem to be able to provide much support for this thesis. Certainly, most serious Roman Catholics would share in Rah's criticisms of "white" evangelicalism. In fact, Roman Catholics faced decades of persecution in this country due to their dissent from WASP culture. But, according to Rah's apparent thesis, even they must implicitly share the blame for the shallow narcissism of American evangelicalism. And what about Dutch Calvinists, German Lutherans, Scots-Irish Covenanters, and Swiss Mennonites, who have all generally absented themselves from American evangelicalism? Apparently, they too share blame.

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