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Why did you decide to write *The Next Evangelicalism*?

Soong-Chan Rah: The book arises out of my experience as a pastor, as a professor, and as a participant in and observer of American culture and the evangelical subculture. I also write out of my experience as an immigrant and as someone who has grown up in the context of the immigrant church and also steeped in the evangelical culture. My motivation is out of a deep concern and love for Christ's church and to see the church prepared for the next stage of Christianity in the West.

How is American Christianity changing and what do those changes mean for American churches?

Rah: In the past one hundred years, Christianity has shifted rapidly from a Western, white-dominant Christianity to a much more global Christianity. In the same way, American evangelicalism is seeing a change in its demographics—American Christianity is becoming less white and more multiethnic. Yet, many of the systems and assumptions of evangelicalism are still rooted in Western, white culture. A greater awareness of the obstacles to a multiethnic church—an increasingly popular topic of discussion—is needed. American evangelicalism is held captive to Western, white culture—in its worship, ministry style, philosophy of ministry, social and political involvement, etc.—preventing the church from being prepared to tackle the challenges of twenty-first-century Christianity. In the emerging culture of the twenty-first century, we must begin to disengage the elements of white culture from the church and explore ways that the Christian community can reflect biblical rather than cultural norms.

What are some examples of the North American church being held captive by Western culture?

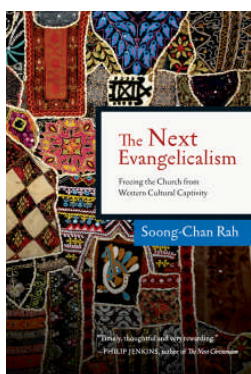
Rah: I highlight three areas in which the North American church more accurately reflects the values of Western culture rather than the values of Scripture:

1. Individualism—our sense of the primacy of the individual in our society and in the context of the church
2. Materialism—the way we value material success at the expense of scriptural values
3. Racism—where we honor and lift up one race's point of view—the dominant culture's point of view—above other perspectives, and we centralize a theology that emerges out of dominant culture and assume that this point of view is normative for other cultures

We read the Scriptures through the lens of Western culture and an American worldview. For example, if we were to add up the number of passages that speak about the right to bear arms, that number is zero. I'm not disagreeing with the right to bear arms. I'm just saying

Q&A

AUTHOR INTERVIEW



“Soong-Chan Rah doesn’t just write about the changing face of evangelicalism; he is leading it. As a church planter, pastor, professor and scholar Rah is actively creating a path forward for Christians who have been caught in the traps of individualism, consumerism and racism.”

—Jim Wallis, president, Sojourners, and author of the *New York Times* bestseller *The Great Awakening*

that there is no direct connection between the right to bear arms and the Scriptures. We do, however, see more than one hundred verses that speak about showing compassion to the alien among us. Yet, if we were to discuss these issues with many American evangelicals, you are more likely to find those who are sympathetic to the NRA (National Rifle Association) than those who are concerned about comprehensive immigration reform that treats immigrants with care and compassion.

We also read Scripture through a very individual lens, again, more accurately reflecting Western culture rather than the values of Scripture. We reduce our Scripture teaching to a set of personalized applications on how to live your best life now or how to find purpose for your personal life, rather than seeing that the Bible was written to communities and has a strong corporate implication rather than merely a personal application.

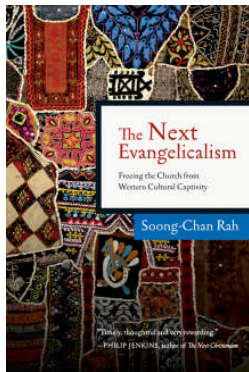
Describe what “the next evangelicalism” might look like for American Christianity.

Rah: We must first acknowledge that global Christianity has changed dramatically. American Christianity is a small, minority percentage of the global Christian population. The real movement of Christianity is in the Southern and Eastern Hemispheres, in Africa, Asia and Latin America. American Christianity’s preeminent role has been vastly diminished. In the same way, we need to examine how there are significant changes in the American Christian demographic—in other words, the next evangelicalism. By 2042 America will be majority nonwhite. My book challenges the assumption that a more multicultural America means a less Christian America. In fact, the more diverse we become, Christianity will flourish, but it will not flourish in the predominantly white communities; it will flourish in the ethnic minority, immigrant and multiethnic communities. American Christianity will be more diverse, and in fact, the majority of Christians will be nonwhite before the rest of American society catches up in 2042.

Because of these seismic shifts in the demographics of American Christianity, we need to rethink our approach to church and ministry, our ecclesiology. We need to engage on a deeper level of crosscultural dialogue and theological reflection. The church in America must be multiethnic on a wider scale and this requires a greater sensitivity and awareness of a wide range of cultural norms and values. The next evangelicalism is clearly multiethnic; our ecclesiology, our methods of ministry, our leadership, who we lift up as models of ministry need to reflect this changing demographic. We need to see churches that are intentionally multiethnic, churches that are seeking ways to incorporate different cultural expressions of faith. We need to see more nonwhite Christian leadership in prominent positions of leadership in denominations, pastors’ conferences and academic institutions.

Q&A

AUTHOR INTERVIEW



*The Next Evangelicalism:
Freeing the Church from
Western Cultural Captivity*
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paperback, \$15,
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What steps can North American churches take toward freeing themselves from Western cultural captivity?

Rah: We need to challenge the assumptions of power and privilege and ask

- Will ethnic minority Christians be willing to lead and serve crossculturally?
- Will white evangelicals be willing to put themselves under the leadership and authority of nonwhite Christians?
- Will white American Christian leaders yield the floor to nonwhite voices at national conferences, in the academy, in denominations?
- Will dying white churches be willing to turn their buildings over to nonwhite, immigrant or multiethnic congregations?
- Will a disenchanted white evangelical be willing to attend a church where he or she is the minority?
- Will churchgoers be willing to submit themselves to the leadership of an African American, Asian American, Latino, Native American pastor?
- Are we willing to submit to the authority of those who are different from us? That will become much more normative in American society, but as yet, it is not the norm for most evangelicals.