



The Next Evangelicalism: Freeing the Church from Western Cultural Captivity

Soong-Chan Rah

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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.

The Next Evangelicalism: Freeing the Church from Western Cultural Captivity Details

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From Reader Review The Next Evangelicalism: Freeing the Church from Western Cultural Captivity for online ebook

Nathan Tornquist says

This book shows its age. It was written in 2009, before white privilege and the cultural conversation was at the forefront of daily discussion. I believe that this book was relevant and useful at the time it was written, but it has certainly not aged well.

The author goes between condemning white churches that have grown (because it's all fake and materialistic) and praising Korean churches that are doing the same (because it's obviously completely driven by the Holy Spirit). As someone that isn't attending either of the churches he references, I can't make a hard comment to the validity of his statements, but the dichotomy between them is present through the whole book.

I really think he has some good points. He finishes the last chapter with: "However, when the neighborhood begins to shift to those who have power, will the new residents composed of upper-middle-class white Americans be willing to attend [the thriving hispanic church in the neighborhood]? ... Or will they implore their previous church in the suburbs to start an "outreach" to the city employing the multisite model?" I believe that is an excellent critique. It's very important to intentionally look for and find the value in all of the congregations. To lift people up and make sure that you aren't covering up the gospel with your particular culture. But it's naive to say that faith and culture can be separated. It's good to try to identify influence, but culture and worldviews will always come through.

This author has clearly had struggles in his life. Many of them seem to have been caused by white people, and his anger is clear. He writes with so much contempt that most of the time it completely masks the message he is trying to say, and past that he writes in the style of the common publishers and leaders he's condemning. The book could have been twice as powerful if it was half the length.

I've struggled in how I take this, because I don't want to discount the points he raises, but from a literary angle I really think it's a pretty bad book. A condensed update from the author and removal of this from print would be better all around.

Jim Herrington says

This is a powerful read by a third generation Korean immigrant who offers a prophetic critique of the church in America.

Jon says

Soong-Chan Rah may not be the voice white Evangelicals want right now, but he is certainly a voice we need. This book was written back in 2009, but its main points have only become more important and more relevant now in 2017.

Rah's argument is essentially that American Evangelicalism is captive to white American culture. That has

led to significant problems in ecclesiology, theology, and missiology. Furthermore, non-white Christian communities have both a tremendous value to add to Christianity writ large and, in many cases, are far more vibrant than white churches.

Rah's book is particularly poignant in our modern cultural moment, where the views of "white Evangelicals" dominate the news cycle and political headlines, obscuring the vibrant non-white congregations throughout our congregation.

This book is now eight years old, which means that there are parts of it that could be considered dated. For example, Rah dedicates an entire chapter to critiquing the white-centric emerging church movement. That movement has largely flamed out, and a chapter today might focus on the media attention given to white Protestant political leaders (particularly in the Trump Age).

This is not a book that lays out a plan for building multi-ethnic congregations so much as it is a prophetic voice calling for repentance. Rah doesn't pull punches, and while some might be turned off by a tone that sometimes comes across as angry, few reading his book would come away un-convicted. Indeed, Rah's book reveals real truths that Evangelicals (white and non-white alike) need to hear. Nowhere in the book does Rah deviate from historical Christianity, and nowhere in the book does he descend into unhelpful criticism.

For that reason, Rah needs to be read and understood, and this book provides an excellent place to start.

Andy Flintoff says

A very good book. I would recommend it to every Christian on the earth today.

Michael-David Sasson says

This is a very interesting and challenging book about how to face the reality of the changing racial composition of the Christian church and provide it ethical, effective, spirit-filled leadership. It's call for leadership of second-gen immigrants and bi-racial people in the next phase of the North American church is fascinating and at odds with other racial justice models that lean more heavily on the experience of the African American church and see that leadership continuing.

I'm not sure I buy the author's sense that social justice is a gospel value and individualism is only a corruption brought on through western philosophy. My read is more that social justice and liberation theology reads of Christian faith have to lean on Hebrew testament stories like that of Exodus, in part, because the collective orientation of the Gospels is rather weak.

p13 In the year 1900, Europe and North America comprised 82 percent of the world's Christian population. [...] By 2050, African, Asian and Latin American Christians will constitute 71 percent of the world's Christian population. These numbers do not account for the fact that a majority of Christians in North America will be nonwhite.

p28 What drives me to see the church not as the expression of God's kingdom but merely as a forum to

address individual needs?

p31 Individuation allows for an important and necessary process of developing a personal relationship with Jesus.

p35 Worship in the white captivity of the church is oftentimes a collection of individuals who happen to be in the same room. Worship is just between the individual and God, and the church service exists to help facilitate that individual communion.

p47 How easy it is for an American Christian to approach finding the right church the way we approach buying cereal at the local supermarket? [...] We're purchasing a product rather than committing to the body of Christ.

p55 When a Christian family moves to a new city, how much of standards by which they choose a church is based upon a shopping list of their personal tastes and wants rather than their commitment to a particular community or their desire to serve a particular neighborhood?

p58 Have we sold our souls to be relevant?

p70 If we use the language of individual sin to address sin, then no individual is guilty. [...] no individual in twenty-first century America has actually owned a slave or taken away land from a Native American. It is too easy to dismiss and disavow individual culpability for the sin of racism. But if we use the language of corporate sin, then we are all complicit. Anyone that has benefitted from America's original sin is guilt of that sin and bears the corporate shame of that sin.

p80 Sin results when human beings attempt to take God's place in creation.

p84 The homogenous unit principle allowed the white church to further propagate a system of white privilege by creating a system of de facto segregation. Segregation justified by a desire for church growth allows affluent white churches to remain separate.

p87 The racial reconciliation and justice approach moves multiethnicity out of the realm of church growth fad to a level of addressing injustice and sin.

p95 Church growth principles, therefore, prioritized an individualized, personal evangelism and salvation over the understanding of the power of the gospel to transform neighborhoods and communities.

p97 [...] an unbiblical divorce of social justice and personal evangelism. [...] [Unbiblical? How? If lean on gospels vs Hebrew testament doesn't seem particularly unbiblical to me....] The Western value of individualism and personal salvation came to the forefront in the church growth movement, suppressing the value of community and social justice.

p134 As individuals and people created in the image of God and as people who have been given a cultural mandate, we have the capacity, and even an obligation, to bring our cultural expression of faith to the mosaic that culminates in Revelation 7. [Is this mosaic before or after 2/3 of the Jews die and go to hell as part of the Xian God's loving plan for multiculturalism?]

p136 [a well stated exposition of OCC's racial theology that I agree with]

p138-9 [author believes in more than one cultural bridge to the Divine as long as each is within the confines of a Christian testimony]

p151 [sigh.. banal use of "shalom", cultural appropriation without any actual appreciation for Jewish language or culture; see p152 where he mis-translates Hebrew for "young woman" to "virgin"]

p151 The doctrine of the incarnation stands in opposition to our obsession with mobility.

p156 The more I learn about the Native American experience, the more amazed I am there would be any remnant that would follow a faith that had essentially been used to destroy their people. [...] Their story is a testimony to the power of grace at work in the narrative of the church.

p188 Multiethnic ministry cannot occur without the unique skills offered by bicultural Americans. Liminality means that the bicultural, second-generation ethnic American has had the journeying experience that will

prove helpful in the ongoing call to racial reconciliation and multiethnicity. Liminal Christians, therefore, should lead the next evangelicism in addressing the challenges of multiethnicity. Instead of being captured or intimidated by Western, white cultural norms, the second-generation immigrant should be stepping up to take on the mantle of leadership.

Heather says

I feel bad about giving this book a two-star rating, because Rah brings many important and valid ideas about race and racism in the white American church. I particularly enjoyed Rah's discussion of how making White Western theology normative suggests that all other theologies (including those that respond to race, etc.) are only to be brought out in special situations, rather than applied throughout our faith experiences. Rah never used the term "white savior," but I also appreciated his thoughts on mission work and the great harm that missionaries can do when only white perspectives are taken into account.

The reasons I am giving this book two stars stem from two different reactions: one, the ways in which this book did not speak to me, and two, the ways in which I thought this book could be improved.

When it comes to the ways this book did not speak to me, I realize that some of my own white privilege can be hindering me from appreciating some of the broader applications of Rah's perspective. At the same time, I do not hail from an evangelical background, and **it was really hard for me to really identify with any of the church practices from a mainline Protestant background.** It is also possible that this book is directed at people with more experience with church-planting practices, which would also leave me on the outside of that culture. The writing style also didn't win me over, either. Long story short, **I am not the intended audience for this book, and without a better understanding of the evangelical church at large, a good deal of this book didn't feel applicable to me.**

Beyond my Lutheran-white-girl-alienation, though, it was also hard for me to ignore the ways in which this book seemed to reinforce injustice even as it protested injustice. In particular, it was impossible for me to ignore the degree to which women's experiences were sidelined in this text. Rah acknowledged that feminist theologies existed, but failed to incorporate feminist and womanist theologies into his vision for a racially just Church. Of the thirty-something authors in his bibliography, only two are women. One is Black, one is white, and neither of them are religious scholars. Given that Rah's research on non-Western and non-White authors and theologians stretches well back into the twentieth century, the lack of engagement with women's writings was conspicuous.

And, of course, I realize that "intersectionality" was not so much of a buzzword ten years ago, but women of color are not silent now and they were not silent then. It's hard to trust a work on racism where their experiences aren't taken into account.

(Also, several uses of the g-slur uncritically applied to *Roma* people.)

Also, some of the things Rah said just felt off-color. This quote in particular bugged me:

"If the religious right were committed to overturning *Roe v. Wade*, there is an easy solution. Give citizenship to the twelve million undocumented aliens, who are largely politically

conservative and would turn the tide and momentum of the abortion debate" (75).

What is that supposed to mean? "If conservatives knew they could use brown people as a means to an end, they would finally accept us!" "You know, if everyone weren't so racist, we could spend more time being sexist!"

I feel like that statement was supposed to be tongue-in-cheek, and yet whenever women's issues came up in the text... it became more clear to me that Rah hoped to seek liberation from racism, but not necessarily anything else.

TL;DR: Rah has many good thoughts on racism in the church, but they may not be applicable to your experience if you are not also evangelical. If you are looking for a book that considers racism and sexism together, look elsewhere.

Adam Ross says

First-generation Korean immigrant Soong-Chan Rah, who founded a multiethnic church in Cambridge and now teaches at North Park Theological Seminary in Chicago, believes that white, middle-class Anglo-Saxon Protestant Christianity is dying out. In this he is not without his allies, and his book *The Next Evangelicalism* joins a growing body of literature arguing this case.

It is in many ways a convincing (and convicting) treatment. Following Phillip Jenkins' now-regarded classic, *The Next Christendom*, in which the Harvard prof reveals that by 2050, white Christians will come to be an ethnic minority in the faith, Soong-Chan argues that this effect can already be seen on American shores. He reveals that generally white, suburban, middle class churches are slowly dying out - while ethnic churches are exploding. And, he notes, we have a hidden assumption that "white" churches are the only churches that matter and thus they are the only churches we pay attention to. Yet, in his example, Boston had 200 churches in 1970. By 2000 A.D. there were 412, though over 150 of those churches were Spanish or Haitian. In other words, we're so caught up in our assumptions that the church in America is shrinking, we have missed that it is only really the American churches that decline, while immigrant and ethnic churches are vibrant, growing - and totally off our radar.

The central thesis of the book is that the Church has so completely identified itself with Western culture that it is no longer relevant. It is an appealing premise because it is, frankly, true, but Soong-Chan is hardly the first person to notice this fact. Yet what makes his book important are not the parts that are common with other books of its kind (I think of the superior *The Great Giveaway* by David Fitch) but in its entire approach. The requisite criticisms of consumerism, individualism, materialism, and the Church Growth movement all appear, yet Soong-Chan deals with them differently than others. Fellow evangelicals like Fitch or Driscoll treat these things as cultural issues, where Soong-Chan's unique take is that these are not just cultural, but ethnic constructs. He approaches the entire subject with his eye directed to race and ethnicity, not merely culture and this casts his whole project in new lights.

As the book progresses, we are treated to other subjects not typically covered in books focused on the cultural captivity of the Church. It was refreshing to read, in what may be one of the book's highlight chapters, a hard and serious critique of the Emergent Church movement as nothing more than another expression of white cultural forms. As Soong-Chan takes Emergents like McLaren to task, you realize that he is, of course, right. The Emergent Church is comprised almost entirely of white people, and for all its talks

about multiethnic churches, so far as statistical data goes, the movement is in the 95% white category. Soong-Chan then resets our thinking helpfully here - statistically, the only true emerging church is the ethnic, Global South, bi-lingual church.

He paints for us the picture of what it is like to be an ethnic minority in America, and pulls back the veil on our hidden assumptions of superiority. White churches are simply "churches," whereas ethnic churches are always identified primarily by their own racial moniker: the "Korean Presbyterian" church down the street. You pastor "Church of the Rock Evangelical," but he pastors a "black Baptist" church. The point is that in our way of naming, white churches are just churches, but attention is drawn to the ethnic or immigrant nature of minority churches, making them nothing more than charming sub-sets of the "real" church. At the very least, he says, this is rather patronizing and means that we are incredibly ill-equipped for the great changes to come. How will we speak of our churches when worship in the majority of churches in the United States are delivered in a language other than English, or has only a minority of white people in them?

Soong-Chan is desirous for ethnic leadership in the church, and wants Western churches to step out of the way and let minorities take greater roles of leadership, not just individually, but as entire local bodies. This is a fine thing, and ought to be encouraged, because we whites do hog the spotlight.

But there is a danger in speaking in terms of ethnicities when it comes to the church, and it appears as though Soong-Chan falls into it. One can easily get the perception from the book that all white culture is bad, and all minority culture is good. We should just get out of the way because we're a bunch of useless lumps, hopelessly compromised with Western culture. First, my brother has shown the danger in thinking culturally or ethnically about the Church.

Secondly, Soong-Chan is as equally compromised by Western culture as any of the issues he points to. Who came up with the idea of diversity or valuing multiethnic cultures? White, middle class Anglo-Saxons teaching at universities, or otherwise people educated in the West. By and large, who tends to push diversity? White people in the media, government and universities. This is not to say that is a bad thing, but lets all be honest about our sources here. Who, incidentally, sent missionaries to all these other countries to bring them the Gospel? White people. We're not playing a "Who converted who, anyway?" sort of game - its an historical fact. How free of Western culture is the Christianity over in other parts of the world. South American evangelicals are notoriously legalistic, which they got from white legalistic (fundamentalist) white Christians a hundred years ago.

Thirdly, in possibly the book's greatest weakness, Soong-Chan ignores completely the fact that if Westerners are captured by Western culture, so too are non-Westerners captured by non-Western cultures. We're not escaping from Western civilization into the great cultural vacuum of happy nothingness and rainbows. We leave one cultural expression into another cultural expression. So into what are we moving?

This then draws into the discussion the fact that the Gospel has suffused Western culture for 1500 years, whereas the Gospel has not been present in the same way in Korea, for instance, for anything close to that time. Western Christians have theological and cultural insights, especially concerning compromise with the world and the temptations of power, that the next evangelicalism will need as their influence grows rapidly in the next few decades. The danger here is that in our rush to let non-Western Christians contribute, both they and we may reject the genuine insights provided by Western Christians over the centuries. The sense one is tempted to get from Soong-Chan's book is that Western Christianity has little to contribute to the conversation. But most of the Church Fathers were Westerners, as were the Protestant Reformers. Sure, we have our own individual quirks as a culture, but does that mean that we must toss out the great theological gains of the past two millennia and start over? I hardly think so.

Soong-Chan also ignores the fact that the gospel is transformative. It doesn't just sit in a culture and do nothing; it tears cultures apart and puts them back together again (not, it should be noted, in the image of the West, but in the image of Scripture). But the implication of the book is that Western culture is bad, so therefore we should take ethnic cultures as they are, and rejoice in this. God doesn't really work that way. I am excited to see how He will transform these other cultures as the West continues to circle the drain. God's only been seriously working His Gospel in these cultures for a few hundred years at most. Many, many people in India are still first, second or third generation Christians. Great transformation is coming in those cultures too, and that is, I think, what we ought to celebrate.

Finally, Soong-Chan paints the dichotomy as between Western cultural captivity on the one hand and non-Western cultural freedom on the other. He uses the example of the Korean and white students at Gordon-Conwell Seminary. The Koreans sat by themselves at one table, and the whites sat at the other table. The white students wished something could be done, but wanted the Koreans to come and sit at their table. Soong-Chan suggested they go and sit at the Korean table. The consensus was that such a plan wouldn't work, because the white students were uncomfortable doing it. This, of course, missed the fact that contemplating sitting at the white table was just as uncomfortable for the Korean students.

But is the solution to go sit at the Korean table or at the White table? Such a solution assumes a certain amount of dichotomy between the two tables. I suggest instead that we work toward everyone meeting together at a table between the two tables. Cultural interaction changes both cultures involved, and so the Next Evangelicalism is not Korean or Global South culture in exclusion of Global North culture, or Western culture. It is instead a glorious hybrid that none of us can yet predict or see, not pure African or South American or Korean or Western. But it is coming, and sooner than we think.

sharon says

It's strange to me how often I was warned away from this book by other Christians, given that the most radical aspect of Rah's book is probably the term "Western cultural captivity" as a descriptor for aspects of the contemporary American evangelical church that rightly deserve criticism. Rah painstakingly sets out his own roots in and routes through Western theology and at no point demands a disavowal of the conservative evangelical tradition wholesale. It is unfortunate that his early critics painted him as a firebrand, since his words have proven quite prophetic in regards to the materialism, individualism, and colonialism of the Western church.

Some of the suggestions/examples are a bit dated at this point, a decade out. The emergent church movement so heavily critiqued in one of the chapters has largely fizzled out (perhaps in part because it was so dominated by the forces and figures Rah identifies). Rah overall stays away from delving fully into white evangelicism's ties to the religious right and political conservatism, an omission that feels rather glaring these days. The two chapters on immigrant and second-generation churches were quite good -- it's clear that Rah feels most in his wheelhouse there -- but I thought it was a real loss that Rah doesn't grapple with any of the negative aspects of these churches. For example, he rightfully describes the immigrant church as a social hub for its community, but glosses over how insularity and the attitude of "providing for one's own" can curtail such groups from taking political action. He speaks (admiringly?) of how immigrant pastors serve as both shepherds and social workers, without mentioning how easily burnout might occur for someone who is considered to be on-call 24/7.

Overall, for Christians who feel alienated from white evangelicalism, there won't be much that's new here.

Rather, this book primarily offers comfort and reassurance that their critiques are real and valid. For those still very much within the "cultural captivity" of the Western church, there will likely be much more discomfort as well as much more to be learned. May they who have ears hear and internalize Rah's words.

Bryce Van Vleet says

I'm recommending this primarily to my church leader friends, be them on church staffs, volunteers, or congregates.

I had the honor of hearing from Dr. Rah first-hand at an annual conference my school hosts. Rah was our keynote speaker, and his lecture seemed to highlight much of what I had thought was wrong with the American Church but was unable to state. *The Next Evangelicalism* names the institution responsible for much of the brokenness "white" American evangelicals have perpetuated - White Cultural Captivity.

This was an especially timely read, as many on the Evangelical Right, around this time every year, declare war on Christmas. "White" American Christians tend to mistake actual persecution with a solid red Starbucks cup. So it seems particularly timely to explore this phenomena.

What I appreciated most about this was the diversity of Rah's source of ideas. He moves expertly and fluidly between philosophy, psychology, urban sociology, literary theory, and, of course, theology. He also pulls often and repeatedly from other thinkers and writers. Both of these additions bolster Rah's credibility and argument. We are inclined to listen to him, not just because he makes sense, but because everyone else around him makes sense too.

Rah, as he himself admits, will be radical to many Evangelical leaders. He will be too liberal, too theoretical, too detached from reality. But here's the ugly truth that's coming: if evangelical leaders are not careful, if they miss the warning signs, they will die on two fronts. Their churches will meet their own demise, and the people they desperately want to serve will leave scorned and disillusioned with this God they claim to serve. With the stakes so high, on Earth and in Eternity, Evangelical leaders must, at the very least, come to Rah with an open mind. Several of his ideas earned margin marks from me.

As an example, he mentioned wanting to free Christian counseling from individual sessions. While he makes a good argument, the truth is that such a shift would be unethical and unwise if one sought out the council of many leading psychologists. Here is the truth about such a book: whatever claims Rah makes need to be evaluated. I think he would tell you the same. We should not blindly accept what he has to say, but we should hear it. We need to.

This lost a star as Rah sometimes casts too wide a net. His argument is well supported but, if possible, is too much so. He covers a lot in a short amount of time, and there is a decent amount of foundational knowledge readers must have in order to appreciate his full argument. That said, he does do an overall good job of building his main argument so that the layman can follow without issue.

Readers should expect to be uncomfortable when they finish this. They should expect to be frustrated and angry and sad. They should expect to be hopeful. But, if they can muster the courage to confront the discomfort, I think they will find it to be worthwhile.

Benjamin Alexander says

This book was incredibly hypocritically racist. The fiercest racism I've seen in my life has not come from whites. The repeated use of the phrase "white cultural captivity" was obnoxious.

The very same things the author attacked in whites he himself committed throughout the book.

...At the same time, I'm glad I read it. Aside from author's poor immaturity and victimization complex it helped -even still- to open my eyes to see the world from a non-white perspective. Many interesting stories and good points in the book.. Like the Bible has many important things to say about caring for the stranger/foreigner in your midst and not self-defense rights, etc.,

Bob says

There is something wrong with much of American evangelicalism in its current form. Many churches are declining. We have moral scandals. Evangelicalism continues to splinter into weird offshoots like the emergent church and various other post-modern expressions. And many quarters of society hear the term and revile us (I say "us" because theologically this is where I would truly locate myself) because of our over-identification with conservative political stances and indeed for becoming a pawn of conservative interests.

Soong-chan Rah writes that it is not evangelicalism that is on the decline, but rather white evangelicalism that is culturally captive to Western cultural values. Not only is there rapid growth of churches taking place throughout the non-Western world, but because of the immigration of so many of these people groups to the West, they, in many cases, are bringing with them a vibrant evangelical faith, and the churches they are establishing are among the most rapidly growing.

The book consists of three parts. The first describes the captivity of the white church, observing our individualism that makes the gospel and the Bible all about me; our consumerism and materialism that Christianizes affluence; and our continuing racism evident even in Christian publishing circles. On this last, he tells the sad tale of a publisher of Vacation Bible School materials who themed one such set of materials "Rickshaw Rally", using all sorts of stereotypical and demeaning Asian stereotypes. When criticized, the publishers responded that the Asians shouldn't take themselves so seriously. In particular, there is the presumption in all this of white privilege--the propensity of whites in organizations and churches to simply consult other whites and do things without consideration or consultation with other cultural groups.

In the second part of this book, Soong-chan Rah explores how pervasive this captivity is as manifest in our church growth and megachurch strategies, the Emergent church, and in our cultural imperialism, our unthinking export of Western ways of doing things around the world. He praises Bill Hybels for his recognition that the Willow Creek model had failed to produce fully-orbed Christian disciples of Christ. And he scathingly criticizes the Emergent church movement as young whites dissatisfied with boomer evangelicalism who are simply creating young white churches reacting against the worst of the previous generation without engaging a broader cultural mix.

He goes on in the third part of the book to prescribe an alternative, which is that the white, culturally captive church needs to learn from and humble itself before the cultures from the Majority world and learn from them. He proposes that we learn a theology of suffering from the African- and Native American churches.

He believes the immigrant church can teach us approaches to holistic evangelism from their experience of addressing comprehensively the needs of their own immigrants coming to the west. And he believes second generation people can serve as "bridge" persons between the West and the rest as those who in some ways are in both, and neither, of these cultures--the culture of their parents, and Western culture.

This is a challenging and blunt book which it needs to be. When, in one of his examples, a dying congregation accepts a bid by a white congregation for half the price being offered by a Korean congregation, one recognizes that niceness just won't cut through the fog and the chains of the captivity he is describing. I believe Rah is spot on in his diagnosis of white evangelicalism and the way forward.

My only question as I read this book is whether the author and those leading the vanguard of this "next evangelicalism" are aware of the dangers of new forms of cultural captivity and privilege to which they could fall prey? Perhaps this is implicit in the incisive critique of these realities in white evangelicalism, but it was not stated. The truth is, these are human conditions present in every culture, not simply white conditions. Culture shapes every form of Christianity, either ordinately or inordinately. Ordinately, this is a thing of beauty as the mosaic of Christians from around the world come together to create a beautiful, God-composed work of art. Similarly, positions of power and influence may be used to effect great good and great service, yet also may be warped to new forms of privilege.

My own hope is to see the dawning of a multicultural evangelicalism where we learn from and humbly submit to each other (beginning with the submission of white churches), and guard each other from hubris and the pitfalls of cultural captivities of every sort and the temptation to privilege in all its forms. May we not simply exchange captivities but move to a greater freedom for all the children of God!

Jeff says

There are a number of good, critical reviews of this book on Amazon.com. I'm not going to attempt another. I will say that I'm in agreement with much that is said in this book but the author probably does not do much to further his cause by the way that he says it. The author points out the captivity of the white, Western portion of the evangelical church to individualism, consumerism & materialism and racism. I'm not sure that whites and Westerners have necessarily cornered the market on materialism or racism, in fact, I'm quite sure they have not, or that individualism is in all ways and at all times an unquestionable curse but there is no denying that these are powerfully formative of most Americans and so most American churches. But is there really anything new in all this, though I guess some are still coming to the realization. He is particularly and specifically hard on the emerging church. That's an easy target but for some reason (hmmmm) he does not mention the So.Baptists by name though he makes quite a bit of a specific incident which is meant to illustrate racism. What is newer is his reflection on the white, Western cultural captivity of the evangelical church in light of the reality that it is the non-white, non-Western segment of the the evangelical church in the U.S. that is actually growing fastest and that appears to be the future of the church. If the present minority but soon to be majority churches are growing as robustly as said, given time, things may actually work out. But in a book of this tone it seems a bit of irony for the author to point to immigrant ethnic churches as the example of "how to" seeing as most are not at all the diverse bodies that he believes the majority churches should be. When he goes off wringing his hands about how all the soon-to-be-empty church properties and buildings now held captive by white western Christians will be disposed of once they are defunct, that's the point I check out of the conversation.

Corey says

In his book, “The Next Evangelicalism,” Soong-Chan Rah develops the argument that the church in America is held captive to western culture. The church in America is indubitably controlled by white, western, evangelicals. The problem with this captivity, according to Rah, is that the American is more diverse and includes minority cultures who are quickly increasing in demographic size, yet are marginalized in the church: “What we are witnessing in the twenty-first century is the captivity of the church to the dominant Western culture and white leadership, which is in stark contrast to the demographic reality of Christianity in the twenty-first century. Even if we could justify the white captivity of the church in the early part of the twentieth century, there is no justification for it now.” Central to Rah’s thesis are concepts such cultural captivity, privilege, superiority, and power. Rah develops these concepts in order to free American Evangelicalism from its current state of captivity so that it can move into “the next evangelicalism.”

According to Rah, church historians have used the phrase “captivity of the church” in different contexts. The captivity of the church refers to the “danger of the church being defined by an influence other than the Scriptures.” Based on this definition, Rah argues that “white culture has dominated, shaped and captured Christianity in the United States.” In other words, the American church today is defined more by western culture than by Scripture. And this captivity was achieved by concepts such as “white privilege” and the sense of superiority of western culture. And because privilege and perceived superiority secures cultural power, this captivity remains.

White privilege, according Rah is “the system that places white culture in American society at the center with all other cultures on the fringes.” He then makes the connection from privilege to power, “The equation of being white with being human secures a position of power. White people have power and believe that they think, feel, and act like and for all people...white people create the dominant images of the world and don’t quite see that they thus construct the world in their own image; white people set standards for humanity by which they are bound to succeed and others bound to fail...Privilege, therefore, is power. Privilege, when it is unnamed, holds and even greater power.”

As an example of this cultural privilege and perceived superiority, Rah recounts a story from the Chicago Tribune of two churches who are bidding on the church building of a dying white congregation in a Chicago suburb. One of the bids came from Cornerstone (a white congregation) at \$500,000. Another bid from Antioch, a Korean immigrant church came in at \$1 million. However, despite the higher bid of the Korean church, the host church chose to sell the building to the white congregation for less. At the members’ meeting which decided which bid to accept, remarks were made by the host church that ‘Koreans are dirty,’ ‘Koreans do not clean their site’ and ‘Korean kids are running around and cannot be controlled.’ In response to these statements, it is reported that many members cheered. In the end, the moderator asked, “Are we going to sell our building to Cornerstone, or to an immigrant church?” In unison, the people vocalized their support of the sale to the white congregation. In his reflection, Rah notes that “White privilege means that white Christians decide that another white church is more deserving of inheriting a church building, even when their bid is lower than a Korean church’s bid. Privilege for the white Christian community is the power to assume what is acceptable and appropriate behavior. Privilege for the white Christian means the assumption that his or her value system, norms, cultural expressions will be the acceptable norm, while ‘other’ cultures will remain on the fringes of American society.”

In Rah’s judgement, this all needs to change. After all, the demographics of the American church are changing rapidly, with immigrants and minority cultures becoming more prevalent: “By the year 2050, projections point to a nation without an ethnic majority. America will no longer be a Euro-centric, white

nation.” But to the extent that this white, western captivity remains, the American church will be severely weakened.

On the flip side, he cites a positive example of a declining white congregation choosing to merge and release their name, power and resources over to a multi-ethnic church pastored by a Korean-American. As a result, this younger church inherited a building, land and resources totaling \$8 million. Rah sees this as the way forward: “Interbay (church), in an act of obedience and humility chose to invest not in a dying, Western, white cultural captivity, but in the future of then next evangelicalism.”

Overall, Rah’s book was provocative, challenging, and eye-opening. In general, his chapter on racism was most eye-opening. The section on white privilege challenged my understanding of the nature of the church. Specifically, the western captivity to theology was provocative. Rah writes, “Theology that prioritizes the individual and arises out of the Western, white context becomes the standard expression of orthodox theology.” In contrast, “Western theology with its individual focus is considered normative theology, while non-Western theology is theology on the fringes and must be explained as being a theology applicable only in a particular context and to a particular people group. Because theology emerging from a Western, white context is considered normative, it places non-Western theology in an inferior position and elevates Western theology as the standard by which all other theological frameworks and points of view are measured.” Only until recently have I begun to see the affects that Western captivity has had on the theological task of the global church.

Another challenging point Rah makes is his critique of the Homogenous Unit Principle. While there are numerous points of criticism that have been leveled by critics of the HUP, Rah’s critique extends beyond its strategic merits, stating that the HUP “allowed the white church to further propagate a system of white privilege by creating a system of de facto segregation.” In other words, Rah seems to suggest that the HUP is not merely ineffective missiological strategy, but is actually sinful. In his view, the church ought to be multi-ethnic is a moral imperative.

For years I’ve wrestled with this notion that a church ought to be multiethnic. It’s one thing to desire a multi-ethnic church, it’s another to require it. The wrestling is not so much about whether it’s a good idea, but whether it’s the best solution to segregation and racism. Until recently, I would have said the solution to racism and segregation is the gospel, not multi-ethnic church planting. However, I think I was wrong. And I think Rah’s goal is on target. And while I still think understanding and preaching the gospel is key, we need to apply the gospel to our lives in ways that actually address segregation and structural racism. In fact, my previous way of thinking about the gospel reflects my own white western cultural bias toward seeing the gospel as only personal. Further, it seems Rah envisions multi-ethnic churches solving more than personal prejudice, but solving the problem of the western cultural captivity of the church in America. And I agree. I think if the American church is to move toward a future that is free from western cultural captivity, we need churches whose power, privilege, and leadership are shared with other ethnic groups. This cannot happen if we remain segregated. Multi-ethnic churches create space for white people to learn to value other cultures and the theologies, outreach strategies, and worship styles of minority cultures.

Jodie Pine says

I LOVED this book, and I know I will return to it again and again. So many helpful insights into the Western, white captivity of the church with an emphasis on the need for whites to accept spiritual leadership from non-whites, to realize we have so much to learn from people of color--to recognize and let go of our

prevalent paternalistic thinking that privilege and power give whites the obligation to "help" the marginalized and minorities.

I thought this quote from one of Rah's talks at Wheaton was especially gripping: "If you are a white Christian wanting to be a missionary in this day and age, and you have never had a nonwhite mentor, then you will not be a missionary. You will be a colonist. Instead of taking the gospel message into the world, you will take an Americanized version of the gospel."

Tim Lapetino says

Soong-Chan Rah's book was probably more provocative when it was published a decade ago. In the intervening years, his premise of thoughtful, sensitive racial awareness and reconciliation in the evangelical church has become much more accepted. That is great. That he sowed seeds of thought leadership in this is appreciated.

Unfortunately, the supporting framework that underpins his main points hasn't aged well at all. His examples are often weak and lack the substantial detail I craved. Further depth would have been nice, but in its place is left an incredible amount of repetition of the same few points. Better editing would have eliminated some of this and I wished for more elaboration and granular, nuanced thinking.

While I really appreciated the main lessons of the book as challenging jumping-off points for me to seriously consider, the book succeeds at times despite itself. His critical tone sometimes crosses into obnoxious, almost mean-spirited critique. Rah sacrifices some of the prophetic high ground with an attitude that occasionally appears to lack forgiveness and humility.

Overall, I'm glad to have been exposed to challenging heart issues of this book, but the messenger of these ideas could have delivered them in a far greater way.
