BOOKS I HAVE READ: THE NEXT EVANGELICALISM

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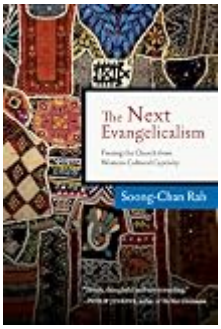
"For most of its history (but particularly for the last fifty years), American evangelicalism has more accurately reflected the values, culture and ethos of Western, white American culture than the views of Scripture..."
Category: Observations

One of the downsides of spending significant time working as a missionary is that you can feel as thought you don't really fit in anywhere; especially in Church.

A lot of this can be attributed to a sort of reverse culture shock. Exposure to other languages, cultures and ways of doing things can make church at home seem rather dull. Â Being honest, this is more a problem with the returning missionary, rather than with the church. However, it is also true that exposure to the way that Christians live out their faith in other contexts does not always place the western church in a flattering light.

The Next Evangelicalism: Freeing the Church from Western Cultural CaptivityÂ by Soong-Chan Rah, expresses some of the frustrations that I have sometimes felt about church in the UK in a gracious, if forthright manner. Rah is a first generation Korean immigrant to the US, who pastors a growing mulit-national church. In nine chapters, he covers hot topics such as individualism, racism and learning from immigrant churches. It is not a comfortable read, but it is compelling for those of us who are part of the white, western Church. Though he writes from an American perspective, his insights are equally relevant to the UK and Europe. Here are a few quotes to give you an idea of the sort of thing he is saying:

> *For most of its history (but particularly for the last fifty years), American evangelicalism has more accurately reflected the values, culture and ethos of Western, white American culture than the views of Scripture...*
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> *The danger of the Western, white captivity of the church is an excessive individualism and personalism that reflects the narcissism of American culture rather than the redemptive power of the gospel message...*
>
> *Worship in the white captivity of the church is oftentimes a collection of individuals who happen to be in the same room...*



As you can see, it's hard hitting stuff, but before you dismiss what he is saying, get hold of the book and read the whole thing, not just my isolated quotes. It is hard to argue with the totality of what he says.

From these quotes, it might seem that this is a depressing or downbeat book, but that would be far from the truth. It is a book that is full of hope for the church and the glory of God in this world. However, it does pose the question as to whether the church in the west is in the right place to join

in with what God is doing.

If you are in church leadership in Europe or N. America, you should give this book a read, with an open mind. It is far from comfortable, but it is a timely message for the world I live in.