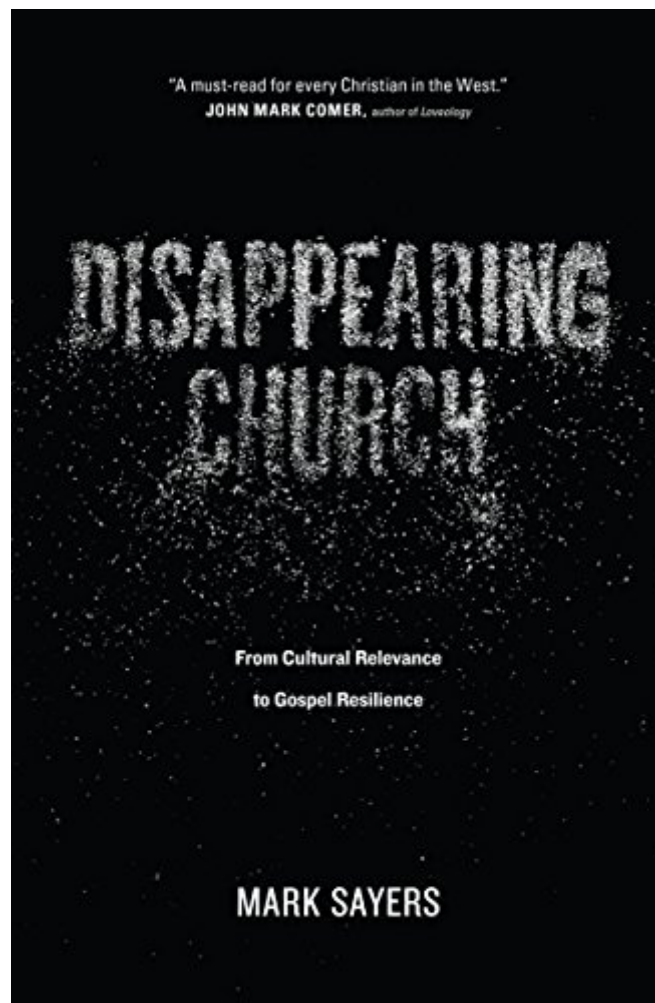




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Disappearing Church: From Cultural Relevance To Gospel Resilience



Synopsis

When church and culture look the same...For the many Christians eager to prove we can be both holy and cool, cultural pressures are too much. We either compartmentalize our faith or drift from it altogether into a world that's so alluring. Have you wondered lately: Why does the Western church look so much like the world? Why are so many of my friends leaving the faith? How can we get back to our roots? *Disappearing Church* will help you sort through concerns like these, guiding you in a thoughtful, faithful, and hopeful response. Weaving together art, history, and theology, pastor and cultural observer Mark Sayers reminds us that real growth happens when the church embraces its countercultural witness, not when it blends in. It's like Jesus said long ago, "If the salt loses its saltiness, it is no longer good for anything." •

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Customer Reviews

Summary: It is a deep look at our culture and how Christianity fits into it. Sayers is gospel guy,

calling the church back to its faithful orthodoxy, the Bible and courageous creative response in light of the new cultural landscape. The Good: Sayers uses illustrations very effectively. They have wide range from islands traditions changing how they reacted to the Tsunami (134ff), movies (Safe 53 and Her 89), to Al-Qaeda versus Islamic state comparisons (109ff). Sayers talks of Christianity's "soft power (p. 10)" and the page before quotes another claiming Christianity is full of "thousands of quiet kindnesses."

Chapter 2 draws out an interesting history of how the north American church (and apparently the author homeland of Australia as well) is obsessed with "relevance." It was fairly insightful. Chapter 3 is very good. It starts out with the often-cited Chinese sociologist given credit to the rise of the west not to guns, political structure, or but in sum, "we have realized that the heart of your culture is your religion: Christianity (41)."

The real gem in chapter 3 is the first, second and third culture explanation. First cultures "believe in many gods (43)."

Second cultures "are rooted in the Judeo-Christian ethic (43)."

Third cultures "define themselves against second cultures (45)."

This insight into modern religious culture is tremendously astute. A partial solution offered here in the narrative is given in the words of Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, "to become a creativity minority is not easy, because it involves maintaining strong links with the outside world while staying true to your faith, seeking not merely to keep the sacred flame burning but also to transform the larger society of which you are a part (page 50)."

Chapter 4 lost me for a little. The talk about Gnosticism didn't match up with what my seminary and undergrad profs talk about Gnostic teaching. But Sayers is using this in a similar way to many others currently. Sayer's new Gnosticism seems a combo of Zen Buddhism/Mindfulness, New Age thought, Secular Humanism and self-help movement, and the Prosperity Gospel. It seems Sayer's is labeling a combo of all the threats to Christianity currently in one title. But I now found out there is a fairly large focus to this new label. Here is a solid quote from Chapter 4. "Gnosticism is an attempt to retain the fruits of Christianity and the solace of faith while maximizing the individual's authority. It is the post-Christian impulse par excellence (59)."

Part 2 (chapters 5 +) follows this outline: New Cultural Landscape (A) + Faithful Orthodoxy (B) + Courageous Creative Response (C) = Revitalization of the church and culture (D). He does a fairly accurate job to present solutions that aren't simplistic and actually seem like they could work in the real world. Chapter 9 has a stand out idea. "Institutions are our beliefs and ethics enfolded. They bring ideas down from the ether and ensure that they are operating within actual life of a community (132)."

Sayers solution to helping the church rise and through it the gospel is strengthening the institutions that purport ideas. For the gospel to flourish churches need to flourish. He quotes Andy Crouch, "Institutions are the way the teeming abundance of human creativity and culture are handed on to future generations (135). Sayers ends the book with a call to abide in Christ. "To do this (abiding and making an impact) we must again learn to abide in the Father (167).

Mark Sayers has written a book that should be on every pastors shelf, indeed on every Christ followers shelf as well. He has obviously spent many hours working with God on the reasons behind the decline in the Church as a whole. I love one of the lines in the book which says "In a world where friends are added with a button and the beautiful, blank faces of stock photography stare out at us, church and faith offer us true, face-to-face encounters." As Mark points out, it is only with these encounters that we can live out the words of Christ in Matthew 28:19-20. Gnosticism has indeed reared it's ugly head in the modern church in new, stealthy ways that make self seem more important than obedience to God's calling in our lives. As Mark says "the enemy is not outside the ramparts, it is inside the castle." It is time for the Church to sit up and take notice. "To learn to abide in Christ, we also must break from the lures that surround us, while still offering good news to the culture that seduces us." An excellent book.

This is a must read for any pastor or church leader! I read it through and then immediately turned back to page one and read it again. It's a great work in helping us understand the times we live in and what to do as we move into the future.

If you don't love Jesus, His church and His word, you will not love this book. This book needs to be in the hands of everyone who attends church on the planet. Amazing work.

This book is an amazing theological and philosophical work that diagnoses the climate change in the culture. Is there an advantage for the church in slipping out of the cultural limelight? Can the radical individualism of Western culture be engaged with the Gospel? Read the book.

I loved this book. Such a brilliant and clear evaluation of "third culture" and why what the church in the West is trying to do to reach it is not at all working. I hope many Christians read this and gain insight from it.

A wakeup call for the church in the west. We have move so far beyond what the Church is supposed to be and Mark Salyer (a very pleasant fellow in person) clearly points this out. An excellent read!

Awesome

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