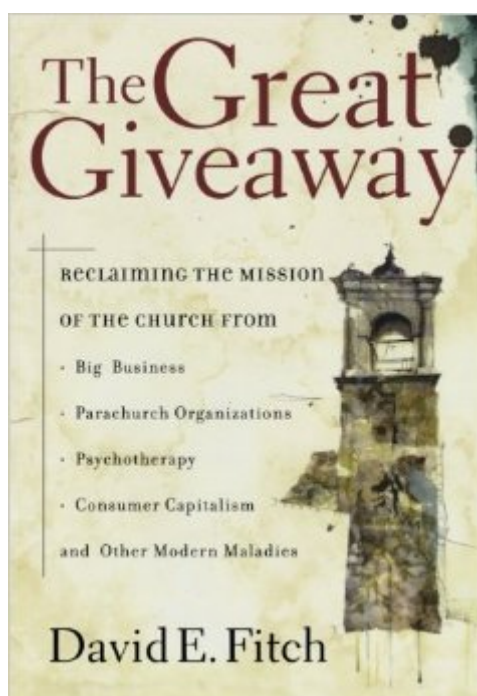


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The Great Giveaway: Reclaiming The Mission Of The Church From Big Business, Parachurch Organizations, Psychotherapy, Consumer Capitalism, And Other Modern Maladies



Synopsis

"North American evangelicals learned to do church in relation to modernity," asserts David Fitch. Furthermore, evangelicals have begun to model their ministries after the secular sciences or even to farm out functions of the church whenever it seems more efficient. As a result, the church, too often, has stopped being the church. In *The Great Giveaway*, Fitch examines various church practices and shows how and why each function has been compromised by modernity. Discussing such ministries as evangelism, physical healing, and spiritual formation, Fitch challenges Christians to reclaim these lost practices so that the church can regain its influence. Pastors, leaders, and students who minister to the postmodern world will find in this book fresh insight that will stir the hearts of many and spark much needed discussion about the evangelical church.

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Customer Reviews

A lot of books critique the modern evangelical church. A critique can be helpful, but what is even more useful is some help on how to be the church more faithfully. It's even better if this help is given from someone who is thoughtful, not just pragmatic, and a practitioner, not just a theoretician. *The Great Giveaway* is a book that offers this type of help. It's written by David E. Fitch, pastor of Life on the Vine Christian Community in Long Grove, Illinois. "The thesis of the book is that evangelicalism has 'given away' being the church in North America." How? By forfeiting the practices that constitute being the church. According to Fitch, evangelicalism has given away being the church by accepting the assumptions of modernism, which are increasingly suspect. *The Great Giveaway* examines how

the church has given away eight functions of the church to modernity, and offers solutions on how to recover each function:-Our definition of success - We measure success by size because we have accepted the modern values of individualism and efficiency. Big churches are seen as successful, when it is more difficult to be the church past a certain size. Instead, success should be measured by measuring faithfulness rather than size.-Evangelism - We rely on arguments, presentations, and proofs in our Gospel presentations, rather than embodying the reality of Jesus Christ being lived within our churches.-Leadership - We have imported CEO-styles of leadership into the church, and measured pastors by success in ministry more than faithfulness to Christ. CEO-style leaders are isolated and it is assumed they can manage their own sanctification.

This biting critique of the modern American church has basically lifted the veil off the capitalistic, consumeristic, numbers-oriented megachurches. David Fitch, Pastor of a church just 20 minutes from the headlining, 10,000 member Willow Creek Community Church, levels a pretty harsh attack on the big churches. While there are positive suggestions for alternative church models at the end of every chapter, it's clear that Fitch has a bone to pick. He goes systematically through the modern church's emphasis on quantifiable success, evangelism, leadership without moral accountability, emotive worship, expository preaching that does not take place in community, justice that is farmed out to parachurch organizations, spiritual formation that is farmed out to psychiatrists, and education of children that is entrusted to an areligious public school system. For anyone whose lived in the world of the megachurch, this is a really fun read. It's what we whisper about over coffee on the patio when the sermon has taught us 7 steps to better marriages or when the Good Friday service is "exciting" rather than sobering. Fitch has a determined, analytical mind. I hope he writes more. The downside is that his alternatives sound like an afterthought that do not admit to their own weaknesses. It's very dubious that he's found an alternative to megachurches that is itself without just as many flaws. He's not nuanced enough to suggest that he's offering a cooperative alternative in a megachurch culture. Rather, they're wrong and he's right. Secondly, chapter seven, on spiritual formation, is a bit insensitive. Though he credits this to modern ideologies, it might be his personal style.

In his excellent study "The Way of the Modern World," Craig Gay observes that "it seems that the ideas with the most profound consequences are frequently taken for granted. They are the ideas that lie just behind conscious thought, providing a kind of foundation for the deliberations of everyday life." In "The Great Giveaway," Dave Fitch attempts to diagnose and offer correctives to

some of the ways in which the evangelical church in North America has come to "take for granted" many of the unconscious assumptions and controlling ideas of secular modernity thus leading it to "give away" being the living Body of Christ in the world. He attempts to uncover the ways in which modern assumptions concerning such things as success, leadership, character formation, and justice have warped our understandings of them as Christians and have lead us to be unfaithful to the Bible and the gospel of Christ. He also attempts show how evangelicals have given away even specific practices of the church such as preaching, worship, and evangelism to the controlling assumptions of modernity, sometimes even when we think we are being the most faithful. Fitch identifies some of the hallmark characteristics of modernity as being a fascination with technique, a fixation on efficiency and effectiveness, individualism, elevation of experience and self-expression, and an attachment to scientific rationality among other things. Fitch argues that these characteristic assumptions of modernity have infiltrated evangelicalism and have hampered our ability to be faithful to the mission of Christ in the world. For example, he argues that our view of leadership in the church has become more shaped by the CEO model of American business culture than by the teachings of Jesus and the model of the New Testament church.

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