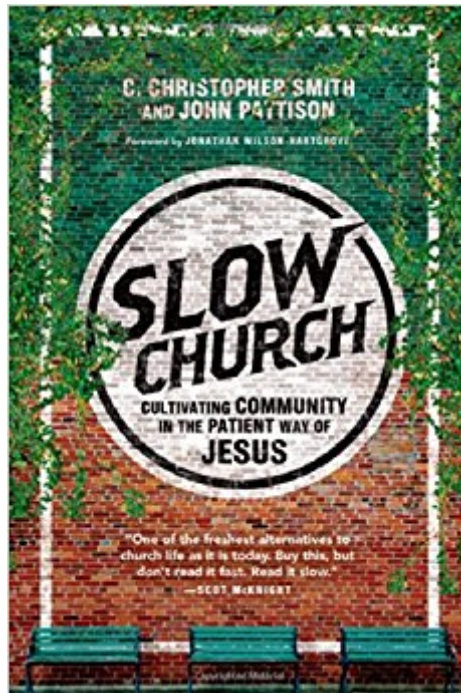




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Slow Church: Cultivating Community In The Patient Way Of Jesus



Synopsis

2014 Readers' Choice Award Winner 2014 Best Books About the Church from Byron Borger, Hearts and Minds Bookstore Fast food. Fast cars. Fast and furious. Fast forward. Fast . . . church? The church is often idealized (or demonized) as the last bastion of a bygone era, dragging our feet as we're pulled into new moralities and new spiritualities. We guard our doctrine and our piety with great vigilance. But we often fail to notice how quickly we're capitulating, in the structures and practices of our churches, to a culture of unreflective speed, dehumanizing efficiency and dis-integrating isolationism. In the beginning, the church ate together, traveled together and shared in all facets of life. Centered as they were on Jesus, these seemingly mundane activities took on their own significance in the mission of God. In *Slow Church*, Chris Smith and John Pattison invite us to leave franchise faith behind and enter into the ecology, economy and ethics of the kingdom of God, where people know each other well and love one another as Christ loved the church.

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Customer Reviews

"The authors write clearly and persuasively; each section of the book offers a theoretical and scriptural basis for the ideas discussed and practical suggestions for their implementation."

(Publishers Weekly STARRED REVIEW, April 14, 2014)"Slow Church is a manifesto and handbook rolled into one. Unlike most manifestos, it is beautifully written, blending historical analysis, personal narrative, and scriptural exegesis into prose that is languid, incisive, and eloquent. It reads like what it is: the long, patient fruit of two men deeply rooted in a particular place, among neighbors they

know, love, and serve. . . . No matter the size of our church body or the kind of neighborhood we live in, we would all do well to slow down and examine ourselves in the clearest light available— the light of history, the light of Scripture, and the light of Christ himself— rather than the fluorescent light of business models and burger joints. Make haste, then. Run, do not walk, to your favorite bookstore, buy a copy, and set your church table for a feast." (Leslie Leyland Fields, Christianity Today, September 2014)"Slow Church explores being church in a way that emphasizes deep engagement in local people and places, quality over quantity, and in all things taking the long view— understanding individuals and congregations as participants in the unfolding drama of all creation. . . . The strength of this book is in its consistent encouragement to reorient ourselves through prayer, scripture, and practice to God's abundant gifts and wellspring of possibilities, even in broken places and circumstances. While the generative imaginative space this creates doesn't work miracles (remember, we're talking slow) on tight church budgets, neighbors struggling with an exploitative landlord, or conflict in community, it does open us up to material and spiritual resources we might otherwise overlook and remind us that transformation, though it may be a long time coming, is promised to us and all creation. . . . For inspiration you may find yourself returning to this gracefully written ode to God's wonders close at hand, with its vision for individuals and faith communities to savor that goodness and more fully incarnate Christ's love, wherever we have been called to be." (Julie Polter, Sojourners, September/October 2014)"The final chapter of Slow Church envisions, quite biblically and appropriately, church as a shared meal; a 'dinner table conversation as a way of being the church.' Questions that arise during the course of planning a meal— What will we eat? Who will do which tasks? Where will we buy the food and who is invited to the table— reflect many of the same questions raised throughout the book about the way communities of worship think about and implement their way of being in the world. They are questions worth lingering over, even for those who are content with their current ways of being a part of the church, for they invite everyone to a deeper enjoyment of and engagement with the often-strange experience that is church." (Rachel Marie Stone, Books & Culture, September/October 2014)"Inspired by the 'slow food' movement and disheartened by the 'fast' church trends, Smith and Pattison are advocating for 'reimagining what it means to be communities of believers gathered and rooted in particular places at a particular time.' Slow Church promises something richer and more substantive than quick fixes." (Relevant Magazine, May/June 2014)"At long last, a book I relish giving away to the vast number of people longing for an alternative between 'McDonald Church' and the end of the church altogether. In neighborhoods across North America there are hundreds of thousands of Christ-followers trying to

experiment with a new way of being the church in everyday life. Now there is a hopeful guidebook that is rich with empirical and anecdotal research, historical depth and theological savvy that can guide their way. This is the book you rush out and buy a dozen copies of to give hope and help to your friends who want to follow the way of Jesus." (Paul Sparks, coauthor of *The New Parish* and cofounder of Parish Collective)"Smith and Pattison marshal the wisdom of our greatest cultural thinkers—people like Berry, Heschel, Pollan and Vanier—in this tour-de-force manifesto. This smart book reveals the vacuity of fast church and realigns us with the locality, rest, unpredictability and simple delight that comes with the way of Jesus." (Jon M. Sweeney, author of *When Saint Francis Saved the Church*)"In this agitated and anxious world, our worth is determined by our productivity and our value is measured by how much we can devour. Without much thought, even our churches have become tangled up in our quick-consumption mentality. In the midst of the greedy mindlessness of ministry, C. Christopher Smith and John Pattison evoke a different vision—one of a careful community of deep relationships. As a pastor, I lingered over the words of *Slow Church* with delight as they inspired me and made me welcome what we might become." (Carol Howard Merritt, pastor, author of *Reframing Hope* and *Tribal Church*)"Hurry, worry, stress and striving have come to dominate human consciousness in the twenty-first century—the logical consequences of a society built on individualism and productivity at any cost. We long for a pace of life that allows us to enjoy deep relationships, meaningful work, spiritual vitality and the simple pleasures of life. In *Slow Church*, Pattison and Smith offer a hopeful vision of the future, rooted in the Christian gospel, that provides a comprehensive orientation for pursuing a more integrative path. This book tenderly calls common assumptions about the church and society into question, carefully synthesizing Christian theology with emerging ecological consciousness. For the sake of our souls, our grandchildren and the planet, I hope we pay attention to Smith and Pattison's conclusions and take action." (Mark Scandrette, author of *Free and Practicing the Way of Jesus*)"All of our churches are shaped by our cultural environments, and Smith and Pattison note how forces such as fragmentation, impatience, commodification, branding, hypermobility, individualism and efficiency too often dominate our practices and priorities. So we strive for control in the midst of fears and self-protection. *Slow Church* provides theology and imagination that connect gospel embodiment with place and neighbors, calling us to slower lives around tables and conversations that nourish and interweave gratefulness, listening, work, hospitality, justice and the biblical trajectory toward the reconciliation of all things. Less of McDonalds; more of sabbath feasts." (Mark Lau Branson, Homer L. Goddard Professor of the Ministry of the Laity, Fuller Seminary)"*Slow Church* spurs imagination for God's patient, diligent working in the small everyday peculiarities of

our lives together with him. It's a call to the simple goodness of life--made possible with God in community and neighborhood. Read it and be cured forever of programmed church." (David Fitch, B. R. Lindner Professor of Evangelical Theology, Northern Seminary, and author of *Prodigal Christianity*) "James Houston once wrote, 'the speed of godliness is slow.' In a culture that values speed and worships efficiency, Christopher Smith and John Pattison show us the graceful rhythms of fully embodied presence. Food, farming, faith and friendships cannot be rushed; neither can the church. Quality is more important than quantity. Slow Church reveals that there is a better, freer and more hope-filled way than frenetic ministry and exhausted lives. It sees slow not as lazy or bad but as rich and meaningful. This book challenges us to savor--not devour--the blessings of God in the midst of community. Ecclesiologically, patience truly is a virtue. Food tastes better when it marinates. Church is no different." (J.R. Briggs, pastor/cultural cultivator, The Renew Community; founder, Kairos Partnerships; author, *Fail: Finding Hope and Grace in the Midst of Ministry Failure*) "The only way the church can be the church as God wants it is when the people of the church slow down enough to become the church. Good themes, excellent quotations, compelling stories and solid research mark what is one of the freshest alternatives to church life as it is today. Buy this, but don't read it fast. Read it slow." (Scot McKnight, professor of New Testament, Northern Seminary) "Recognizing the destructive consequences of church structures and individual lifestyles built around efficiency, control and hypermobility, Smith and Pattison challenge us to recover the social significance of God's slow and patient work in the world. This beautifully crafted book offers perceptive analyses, asks crucial questions and provides gracious wisdom for finding ways to live more fully attentive to God and to our particular time and place. Slow Church, like a well-prepared meal, provides nourishment and delight, and invites long and fruitful conversation." (Christine D. Pohl, professor of Christian social ethics, Asbury Theological Seminary) "In this timely book Smith and Pattison lead us into the habits and practices that are essential if churches are to savor, mobilize and celebrate the gifts of God's goodness all around. Read it with friends and then be prepared to discover the grit and the grace that make life together a foretaste of the kingdom of God. Slow Church is a beautifully conceived book that challenges us to live more deeply into community and in discipleship of Jesus Christ." (Norman Wirzba, professor of theology and ecology, Duke Divinity School) "The internet providers have persuaded us that 'fast' is better--about everything. As a result, 'slow' is a deeply subversive, countercultural notion in a culture of 'fast.' This thoughtful, discerning book advocates 'slow' in faith and in life. This advocacy is a recognition that faith is a practice of relational fidelity that cannot be reduced to contractual or commodity transaction. The authors ponder and reflect on this summons with both pastoral sensitivity and

missional passion. Readers eager for an evangelically paced life will pay close attention to this advocacy." (Walter Brueggemann, Columbia Theological Seminary)"Chris and John have done a fantastic job of envisioning a wholesomely sustainable, spiritually alluring and thoroughly kingdom-centric church that is simply fulfilling its purpose of witnessing to Jesus in the rhythms of God's grace. I just have to join in! An inspiring read." (Alan Hirsch, author, activist, dreamer, www.alanhirsch.org)"Slow Church offers a layered challenge for congregations to trust that God calls them to be fully present with their community, that God equips them to be instruments of God's gracious hospitality and that God sends them to embody God's love in open conversation with church and community members alike." (Felipe N. Martinez, Presbyterian Outlook, August 19, 2014)"Smith and Pattison do a fantastic job presenting an imaginative vision for what the church could be if it chose to reject the fast and McDonaldized views of our culture and exchanged it for a more intentional, organic, communal way of being God's people in this world." (Christopher G. Woznicki, Themelios, April 2015, 40:1)"Those who are questioning (or despairing over) the temptation of successful, efficient and fast modes of doing church—being part of the 'fast food' culture—will find in this book a helpful way to think about ethical orientations, environment and finances in light of the call of the Gospel. What I think may be particularly helpful is Smith and Pattison's exploration of our understanding of work and the ways Christian communities can encourage people to discriminate between 'good' (meaningful, creative) and 'bad' (depersonalized, isolating) work." (Lina Toth, Regent Reviews, April 2015, 6.2)

C. Christopher Smith is editor of The Englewood Review of Books and a member of the Englewood Christian Church community on the urban Near Eastside of Indianapolis. He is the coauthor of Slow Church. Chris's writing has appeared in Books and Culture, Sojourners, The Christian Century and Indiana Green Living. John Pattison is an author, community advocate, grant writer and nonprofit consultant who leads The Resourceful Community, a blog that connects community leaders to the resources of community flourishing. He is the coauthor of Slow Church and Besides the Bible: 100 Books that Have, Should, or Will Create Christian Culture. Formerly the managing editor of CONSPIRE Magazine and deputy editor of the Burnside Writers Collective, Pattison's essays, articles and reviews have appeared in Relevant, Books & Culture and the Englewood Review of Books. He is also a voting member of the National Book Critics Circle. He lives with his wife Kate and their two daughters in Oregon's Mid-Willamette Valley. Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove (M.Div., Duke Divinity School) is director of the School for Conversion in Durham, North Carolina, where he is a member of the Rutba House new monastic community. He is the author of To Baghdad and

Beyond and coauthor of *Inhabiting the Church: Biblical Wisdom for a New Monasticism*. He is also the coeditor of *School(s) for Conversion: 12 Marks of a New Monasticism*. Catch up with him at newmonasticism.org.

Slow Church is a wonderful book that I highly recommend! It is centered around the three themes of ethics, ecology and economy. There is a strong focus on the importance of embedding ourselves in the local context of our particular place. This is what the ethics of *Slow Church* is about. Chris and John talk about *terroir* as “the combination of nonhuman factors (soil, water, slope, height above sea level, vegetation, micro-climate) and human ones (tradition, practice, cultivation) that gives a unique character to each small agricultural locality and the food grown, raised, made and cooked there.” This is what the slow food movement of Carlo Petrini is based on. *Slow Church* is rooted in the natural and human cultures of a particular place as well, as Chris and John have a strong emphasis on stability and patience to create a relational context of rich depth over time. They go on to talk about the ecology of *Slow Church* which is based on wholeness, work and sabbath. The economy of *Slow Church* is based on abundance, gratitude, hospitality and dinner table conversations. I particularly love the way Chris and John stress how a posture of hospitality to the other and eating together as we become liberated from a scarcity mindset will help us to live more authentically. They bring up how the virtue of conversation, work and rest need to be practiced and not separated from the particular place that we live. I love these themes and quotes from the book: “Deeply rooted and maturing in our particular places, in order to bear fruit, to extend hospitality and to nurture a flourishing community, our faith communities must be deeply rooted and maturing in our particular places. The good and abundant life God intends for creation is through the interdependency of God’s creatures, and this interdependency flourishes best when we stay put over a long period of time.” “Recovering a sense of parish responsibility, of belonging to people and place, we will continue to propagate the disembodied Christianity and its accompanying racial, social and economic injustices.” “Come to know the taste of a place.” “Thus to come to know the taste of a place is to blur the line between ourselves and the other. It thwarts the forces of alienation. As I become part of my place it becomes part of me.” “Providing a rich context to grow deeper...our commitment to grow deeper with the same people in the same place

What may we come what may will provide a rich context through which God will bring forth fruits of the Spirit. The health and fruitfulness of a plant diminishes each time it is uprooted. In the same way, our growth toward patience is stunted each time we uproot ourselves from the sustaining soil of our local community.

I had never heard of either C. Christopher Smith or John Pattison, the coauthors of "Slow Church," and I'm guessing you haven't either. They aren't Seminary professors or famous church growth gurus. Yet, they are insightful writers with a timely message. As the title suggests, this isn't a book with a recipe for microwaving your church on the fast track to becoming a mega-church... and that's quite okay, because Slow Church is not licence for mediocrity either. The book would certainly be useful in a seminary classroom, but I think it's written by "laymen" so well, every member of the body would be blessed by it. You can look up the table of contents on [Amazon](#) or browse through a copy in your local bookstore to see for yourself the breakdown of the book; I'm more interested in sharing with you my impression of the book from my perspective as a Restoration Movement minister. But, I will add here, each chapter stays on track, most of the book is filled with ample quotes from dozens of helpful books, and they conclude their chapters with "Conversation starters" that you could use in a small group study. We are in our 3rd year of a church plant, and most weeks I feel tremendous pressure to be growing our church faster and bigger. I've tried to read half a dozen church growth books with titles you'd more than likely recognize, and frankly I couldn't get through them. I tried to read a few of the "organic" and "simple" church books from the last decade, and I had a hard time plowing through them as well. With Slow Church, I had to pace myself, I wanted to savor each morsel. It was so good, I didn't want to rush through it like a storm that washes away the topsoil, I wanted to let it soak in. As I read Slow Church, I thought of the people I personally minister to, and I wondered how they would respond to the material I was reading. Instead of hawking the book, I mentioned I was reading it, and I did use some of its topics as I preached. I wove in some of Slow Church over a couple of months (in my sermons as I preached & in several tweets on Twitter), and so far I haven't had to nail the back door shut. Slow Church helped me relax my anxieties and it helped me to refocus my priorities. Slow church isn't about giving you permission to forget about growth, it helps you to understand what real growth entails. Slow Church defuses the toxic idea that has infiltrated many congregations, namely Slow Church refutes the accepted ideas that efficiency, consumerism, and control are what works best. We are disconnected from our neighbors, our communities, and mostly from the people we worship with Sunday mornings. Slow Church reflects on the need to say no to the hyperactivity and slick ways of the world, and to slow down long

enough to experience Christianity the way God intended us to, in community, in peace, and unrushed. Slow Church calls us to reconnect with each other, and to reject the materialistic methodology that drives the fast food industry and most of today's culture. Slow Church challenges our craving for quantity over quality, and it gives us fresh ways to envision the Kingdom of God -- to not just measure success, but to aim for significance. God wants us to partner with Him in His creation, and to expand His Kingdom, and for Slow Church this means we give up our narrow view of staking claim to the pitiful little empires we cling to. And, Slow Church calls us to share life together. We are not in competition with the world around us, and you can't stockpile manna, so be compassionate and connect with what counts most, people. The heart of Slow Church is about having the right rhythm which brings true Shalom peace, and Slow church reveals our need to be intentional -- to realize our identities as disciples of Christ. The industrialized culture of speed that we are immersed in has fragmented and warped us; it's caused tremendous relationship deficits. Slow Church is a worthwhile read to help us reconnect with the heart of Jesus' message, to value people, and to see that nickels and noses are not the only or the best marks for faithfulness.

I have read a lot of books and had countless conversations about Church and community, and this is one of the books that I feel gets to the heart of the matter. It addresses something deeper than a trendy fad or the next cool leadership technique. Smith and Pattison draw on numerous sources, both old and new, to provide insight on what it means to be human and apply those principles in this culture today. I cannot emphasize enough how they are getting at a deeper conversation that I found enriching and challenging in how I approach relationships, theology, and church. They address both structural factors and individual characteristics. I earnestly recommend this read to anyone and that he or she should indeed read it slow!

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