

Just buy the book already

by [Carol Howard Merritt](#)

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The Internet loves to disdain the celebrity Christian. If anyone sells too many books, builds too big of a platform, or just gets too big for his or her britches, we like to bring that person down a notch or two. Sometimes it's a [triumph for social justice](#). Other times it feels like [mansplaining](#). Still other times, it seems like good old-fashioned jealousy wrapped in high-tech garb.

For authors, it's exhausting, heart-breaking, and kind of terrifying.

Can I show you what's behind the curtain for a moment? **Progressive Christian authors are suffering**. It's difficult to sell books and it's hard to get book contracts.

With the advent of blogs, podcasts, and social media, other forms of entertainment, like television and books, have taken a serious hit. I'm not so concerned about television. I don't really think each actor in the cast of *Friends* deserved a million dollars per episode, which is what they got at the height of our country's love affair with television.

I do care about books. In particular, I care about volumes that convey a loving, inclusive view of God. I want to read books with racial diversity, liberationist thought, and social justice themes. It's healthy for people to read about compassionate religion. It's good for humanity. It's good for our voice in history.

I obviously have nothing against blogging, podcasting and twittering. I've been doing it for almost a decade now. But I understand their limits, both in their capacity to present complex thoughts, and their ability to be financially sustainable for writers. I have huge respect for black twitter and #blacklivesmatter, but I always read those tweets within the larger framework of [James Cone](#) and [J. Kameron Carter](#).

Right now, the world is difficult for Christian authors who long for liberation. Even serious bloggers who get 20k hits, have a hard time selling books.

We can name a tiny hand full of exceptions. But for the most part, the industry is suffering. We had great hope for Jericho, Hachette's new progressive Christian arm. They picked up some newer writers and gave them solid chances. But while Jericho was learning to toddle, the [Amazon/Hachette](#) debacle hit. Some of the books didn't sell as well as projected, and Jericho has been downsized.

Some of the other bigger publishers who were watching Jericho, seemed to be warming up to the generational religious shifts that include a more generous Christianity. But since it's demise, they have clamped down and won't accept edgier, social-justice driven books. Not necessarily because they are morally opposed to them. It's just that there's just no money in it.

I have been extremely lucky in all of this. [HarperOne](#) is publishing my next book, which is where the few exceptions often publish. I have the opportunity to write for the *Christian Century*, who still works hard to inform its readers of great books. So this plea is not completely self-serving. On behalf of brilliant writers, Christianity, and the world, I declare, **if we don't support the progressive Christian book market, it will dry up. So can we just buy the book?**

Progressive Christians are readers. That's what sets us apart. It's so important to us, that some of us even have book allowances figured into our salary. But if we don't support writers, we won't have any market in a few years. If we don't support new artists or diverse voices, they will go away. Authors have mouths to feed, college bills to shell out for, and housing costs to pay. If they can't do those things by writing, they will have to find another way.

So, can we bust some of the myths?

For the most part, no one is making a lot of money. Really. As pastors, you're probably making more money than 99% of writers. Sometimes an author might be able to make a modest living. I am one of those. But you're probably making more than I am.

For the most part, progressive Christian authors are not famous. A writer might be speaking at a large conference, but she's rarely recognized on the streets.

He might even make it to the *NYT* bestseller list, but even that's fleeting.

I know you could do it, but there's a difference between the possibility and the actual execution. I used to walk into a gallery, see a piece of art and say, "I could do that!"

Finally, an artist responded, "Yeah, but you didn't."

When I read *Eat, Pray, Love*, I had the same aspirational confidence. Even if Elizabeth Gilbert said the same thing that I could say, and I know that I could say it *way better* than she could, I have to give her credit, because she wrote it and I didn't. I just have to buy the book already.

Authors market their own work. I know it's annoying. It's annoying for us too. But this is why we do it. With the downsizing in publishing, publishers had to cut their marketing departments and they started depending on authors to sell their books. It's really awkward. We'd much rather have someone pushing our books out there than having to do it ourselves. But, alas we don't.

So, if we care about having a loving, generous, inclusive Christianity, can we set all this aside and **just buy the book already?**