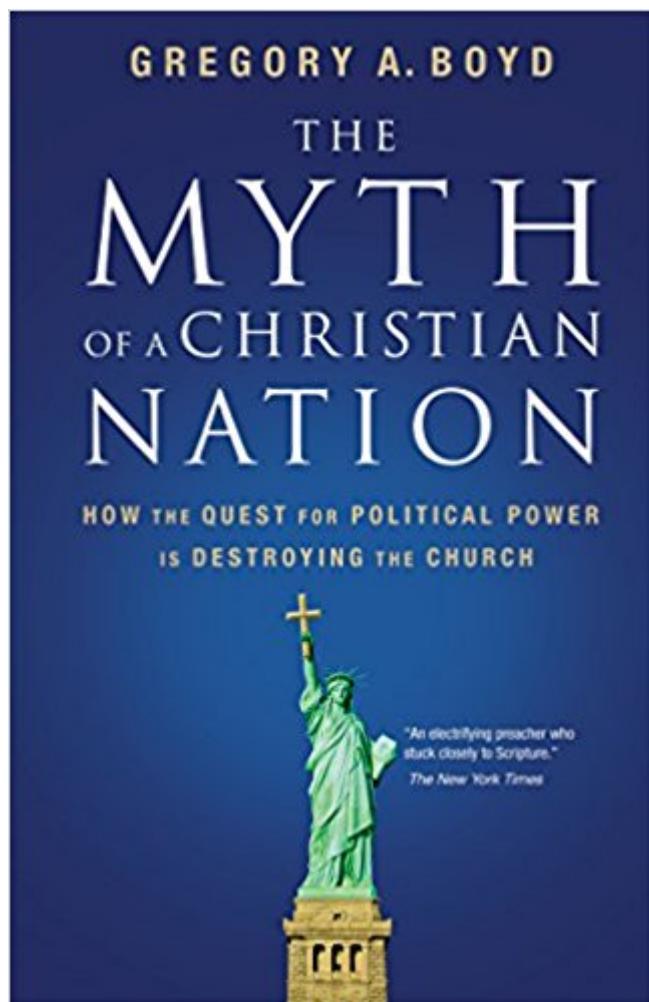


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The Myth Of A Christian Nation: How The Quest For Political Power Is Destroying The Church



Synopsis

The church was established to serve the world with Christ-like love, not to rule the world. It is called to look like a corporate Jesus, dying on the cross for those who crucified him, not a religious version of Caesar. It is called to manifest the kingdom of the cross in contrast to the kingdom of the sword. Whenever the church has succeeded in gaining what most American evangelicals are now trying to get – “political power” – it has been disastrous both for the church and the culture. Whenever the church picks up the sword, it lays down the cross. The present activity of the religious right is destroying the heart and soul of the evangelical church and destroying its unique witness to the world. The church is to have a political voice, but we are to have it the way Jesus had it: by manifesting an alternative to the political, “power over” way of doing life. We are to transform the world by being willing to suffer for others – “exercising power under” – not by getting our way in society – “exercising power over.”

Book Information

Paperback: 224 pages

Publisher: Zondervan; 3/30/07 edition (April 29, 2007)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0310267315

ISBN-13: 978-0310267317

Product Dimensions: 5.5 x 0.5 x 8.5 inches

Shipping Weight: 8 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.4 out of 5 stars (See all reviews) (196 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #77,559 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #49 in Books > Religion & Spirituality > Religious Studies > Ethics #120 in Books > History > World > Religious > Religion, Politics & State #123 in Books > Religion & Spirituality > Religious Studies > Church & State

Customer Reviews

I highly recommend "Myth of a Christian Nation." It is a well written, engaging, and scripturally based book that will likely challenge the Christian reader in the way they live out their faith. Boyd's premise is that the New Testament describes a "power-under" dynamic, where we are called to live radically loving lives that look like Christ. Kingdom people serve others, as Jesus took upon himself the role of a servant and washed the feet of the disciples. As Jesus' loved us enough to give his life for us, we are to love others - even our enemies - to the point of death. The power-under dynamic of the KoG looks like the cross of Christ. Boyd calls the Christian reader to seek to have a KoG mindset,

as defined in scripture, and to live in a way that looks like Christ. Contrasted to this is the Kingdom of the World (KoW) which uses a "power-over" dynamic to achieve individual and tribal influence in the world. In every way it is opposite of the Kingdom of God. Boyd notes that Satan is called the "God of this World", and as such, he exercises significant influence on the world systems. The power-over dynamic looks like the sword. As Boyd tells us this book was inspired by a sermon series he preached in 2004 called the "Cross and the Sword," which resulted in about 20 percent of the congregation leaving his church. A common objection to Boyd's message is that "you cannot separate our faith" from our actions in this world. What I think Boyd is trying to say is that we should not IDENTIFY our society or country as "Christian." Doing so suggests to those outside the church that the actions of our society and our country reflect the Christian faith.

This is a book by a Christian pastor written for other Christians. Non-Christians may find it interesting to learn that not all evangelicals stand shoulder to shoulder with Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson and Tom DeLay in their understanding of the possibility of a truly Christian government. Falwell, Robertson, DeLay, Roy Moore, Tim LaHaye, and a host of others on the Religious Right believe that it is the duty of Christians today to "Take Back America for God." Some (such as Ten Commandments Judge Roy Moore), inspired by the unusual writings of R. J. Rushdoony and Gary North, actually want to make the United States a theocracy, with the constitution trumped by the laws in the Bible. These are the people that Boyd has in mind in this book, though it is important to emphasize that his arguments apply equally to those on the Left, were they to attempt to identify the kingdom of the world with the kingdom of God. Non-Christians would likely also find the tone of the book a bit too devout. The entire book is structured around discussions of Biblical passages, teasing out their meanings, striving to understand the implications of the teachings of Christ and Paul. I personally think the title of the book is a bit misleading, and I wonder if it was his original title. For the book really focuses more on what it means for any Christian anywhere to identify the eternal kingdom of God with the temporal kingdom under which he or she lives. Although Boyd has a very different understanding of the Christian's relationship with the political, he almost could have borrowed St. Augustine's title THE CITY OF GOD (AND THE CITY OF MAN), the latter half the implied title of Augustine's classic. Or the great French lay theologian Jacques Ellul work THE POLITICS OF GOD AND THE POLITICS OF MAN.

Gregory Boyd's concept in the Myth of a Christian Nation obviously did well because it left me nodding in agreement heartily on some points, but scratching my head on others. In essence, he

argues and defends the point that the United States has never been and never will be a Christian Nation. Perhaps by culture, we are--but not in a truly transforming way. Still, for the most part, many Evangelicals equate America (more specifically Republicans) with Christianity. He argues that the Church often operates from a "power over" mentality in which the U.S. Government rules over us like Church officials to regulate our morality. Boyd, on the other hand, suggests we operate from a "power under" mentality of washing feet, being a servant, and offering love. In this aspect, I totally agreed with him. Often, when the Church gets power, it leads to monstrosities like the Inquisition and the Salem Witch Trials. Also, I agreed that American Christianity is often ten miles wide and a half inch deep. We would rather pray against abortion, join a picket line, or write our legislator about the issue than actually really do something about it. We often marginalize "tax collectors" and "sinners," then categorize our sins as not so bad compared to others like homosexuals. According to Boyd, what is really important is serving others and bleeding with them. On this I found a whole-hearted agreement. This comes to ethics. This is relational which is what Christ calls us to. In my personal experience, I find myself closest to God when I'm serving others. I also agreed on his poignancy in pointing out how truly shallow we are. It is truly amazing that many Christians were so upset over the Janet Jackson "wardrobe malfunction" as opposed to injustices that are far more egregious.

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