

The Myth of a Christian Nation
How the Quest for Political Power is Destroying the Church
by Gregory Boyd, Grand Rapids, Zondervan. 2005.

A review by Chuck Jones

1. Mr. Boyd and I share an inclination not to be involved in the political process of electioneering for candidates or issues. It was this reluctance, on his part, that made an increasing number of people in his church irate. It became evident that Mr. Boyd “preached a series of sermons that would provide a Biblical explanation for why our Church should not join the rising chorus of right-wing political activity” (pg 9). This is a book that grew out of that sermon series. The reaction was mixed. Roughly one thousand people left the Church. He is aware that this book may irritate some readers.
2. The central idea of this book is: “I believe a significant segment of American evangelicalism is guilty of nationalistic and political idolatry...I believe many of us American evangelicals have allowed our understanding of the kingdom of God to be polluted with political ideals, agenda, and issues.” (Pg 11).
3. Mr. Boyd does not pronounce political involvement as good or bad. What he does challenge is the idea that the correct political position has anything to do with the kingdom of God. Mr. Boyd does make a negative pronouncement against the idea that America is a Christian nation. This idea, says Boyd, “is damaging both to the church and the advancement of the kingdom of God.” He maintains that belief in this myth has caused evangelicals to accept many pagan aspects of our culture. “Instead of providing the culture with a radically alternative way of life, we largely present it with a religious version of what it already is” (pg 13). What is found in this book can be applied to both the right and left. “Finally, this book is written to help us get a clear vision of the unique kingdom of God as revealed in the life of Jesus” (pg 15).
4. Boyd begins his presentation with Luke 22:25-26. This text delineates the antithesis between the kingdoms of the world and the kingdom of God. His main point in chapter one is that the kingdom of this world exercises power over others. Boyd points out, “Though all version of the kingdoms of the world try to influence how their subjects think and feel, their power resides only in their ability to control behavior, not the heart” (pg 18). Boyd maintains that “the destroyer is the factional ruler of all versions of the kingdoms of the world” (pg 22-23). These kingdoms, throughout history, have been in violent conflict “and all the while, Satan, the ultimate ‘power over’ god of this age, watches the bloodshed with a demonic sense of amusement” (pg 24).

5. To drive home his point of the antithesis, Boyd draws upon the “tit-for-tat kingdom” (pg 24). He uses the incident of the video of Abu Gharib prison, which brought the response of Iraqi terrorists when they released their own video of a grotesque beheading of an American (pg 24). He explains this only proves to escalate hatred. The crusaders can be used as a point of evidence for the actions of Christians, as well as the atrocities of the Muslims. “But this is exactly the sort of thinking that fuels the endless tit-for-tat kingdom of the world. You naturally believe your tribe (Christian/America) is at least a bit less guilty than the opposition... the true cause lies in the fact that our fallen hearts are idolatrous and subject to the fallen powers that influence us” (pg 25-26).

6. Boyd makes this dramatic statement, “Followers of Jesus must realize – and help others realize – that the hope of the world lies not in any particular version of the kingdom of the world gaining the upper hand in Babylon’s endless tit-for-tat game. The hope of the world lies in a kingdom that is not of this world ... that doesn’t participate in tit-for-tat ... that operates with a completely different understanding of power” (pg 27). Jesus showed “that his kingdom would advance not by destroying the enemy who seeks to destroy you, but by loving, serving, and hopefully transforming the enemy who seeks to destroy you” (pg 28).

7. Now that Boyd has your attention he takes the larger picture and brings it to a personal inspection. He brings up various passages:
 - Philippians 2:2 -3, make my joy full, that you be of the same mind, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind; doing nothing through rivalry or through conceit, but in humility, each counting others better than himself;
 - 1 Corinthians 10:24, Let no one seek his own, but each one his neighbor’s good. (33), even as I also please all men in all things, not seeking my own profit, but the profit of the many, that they may be saved.
 - John 13:14-15, If I then, the Lord and the Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you.
 Boyd applies these verses to exercising power under others (pg 31).

8. One of my favorite quotes is: “Coming under others has a power to do what laws and bullets and bombs can never do – namely, bring about transformation in an enemies heart. This is the unique ‘lamb power’ of the kingdom of God, and indeed, this is the power of God Almighty. When God flexes his omnipotent muscles, it doesn’t look like Rambo or the Terminator – it looks like Calvary! And living in this calvary-like love moment by moment, in all circumstances and in relation to all people, is the sole calling of those

who are aligned with the kingdom that Jesus came to bring” (pg 32).

9. You will have to read the remainder of the book to see how these principles are applied to the ‘untouchables’ of our society. We are to imitate Jesus as he dealt with sinners, those considered worthless and castaways. How are you doing? Are you ministering, or staying away? Staying away can’t show Christ’s love.
10. Here are some enticing quotes from the remaining chapters:

Chapter 2. “A person may win by kingdom-of-the-world standards but lose by the standards that eternally count – the kingdom of God ... Jesus taught that there will be many who seem to believe right things and do religious deeds in his name, who he will renounce, for they didn’t love him by loving the homeless, the hungry, the poor and the prisoner” (pg 49).

Chapter 3. “Jesus didn’t come to give us the Christian answer to the world’s many socio-political quandaries, and he didn’t come to usher in a new and improved version of the kingdom of the world. His agenda was far more radical, for he came to redeem the world and ultimately overthrow the kingdom of the world by ushering in an alternative kingdom” (pg 59).

Chapter 4. “Tragically, the history of the church has been largely a history of believers refusing to trust the way of the crucified Nazarene and instead giving in to the very temptation he resisted... For the first three hundred years... the church grew at a mind-boggling rate! The growth came about not by Christians fighting for their rights, as so many do today, but largely by Christians being put to death! In fact many considered it an honor to be allowed to imitate Christ in being sacrificed for the kingdom they were citizens of” (pg 76).

Chapter 5. “My critique is rater toward the American church. We expect nations to be driven by self-interest, but we shouldn’t expect kingdom people to applaud this fact, especially when the national self-interest involves taking lives! Isn’t our central calling as kingdom people to manifest the truth that this old, self-centered tribalistic, violent way of living has been done away in Christ? Are we not to display the truth that in Christ a new humanity has been created, one in which there are no ethnic, nationalistic, gender, social or economic distinctions?” (Pg 90). “Think about it. The Son of God couldn’t exercise “power over”?! He certainly could have, for this is precisely what the Devil offered him! Even apart from this, Jesus had legion of angels at his beck and call and the power of God Almighty at his disposal. Had he wanted to, Jesus could easily have become a victorious Caesar

rather than a crucified Savior.” (Pg 96-97).

Chapter 6. “We have allowed our allegiance to the kingdom of God to be compromised by allegiance to our nation. We have far too often placed our worldly citizenship before our heavenly citizenship (Phil. 3:20) and allowed the flag to smother the cross” (pg 111).

Chapter 7. “We are to demonstrate the kingdom of Calvary-quality acts of service and then proclaim that the domain in which God is king has come. We are to see a need and meet it – no question asked. We are to love even our enemies with an unconditional, nonjudgmental love, and, thereby offer everlasting life to all who are thirsty. To do this means we must refrain from doing what Jesus never did: namely, positioning ourselves as wiser, morally superior guardians and ‘fixers’ of others. Moral guardianship is what the Pharisees did – not Jesus” (pg 132).

Chapter 8. “We must always preserve the holiness and beauty of the kingdom of God by not letting it get co-opted by a nationalistic religion – even, and especially, when we agree that the central value of the nationalistic religion is very important. We must never allow cultural sentiments to compromise our calling to be radically set apart from the masses by our willingness and capacity to love those nationalistic enemies that others despise” (pg 151).

Chapter 9. This chapter deals with the Christian and self-defense, the military, wars and overthrowing oppressors. He deals with some sensitive topics here.

I was taken by this book. I agree with most of what is written. It should not be read with an orthodox mind set, but rather an othopraxis mind set. If one looks for the tight doctrinal compliance, one will miss the massive message of this work. Do you serve Christ or the world? Have you offered all for the sake of the kingdom or saved some for self? Are you ready to sacrifice for someone who is poor, homeless, and sinful? Or do you rather want to have power over them to force them to conform to your way of belief?

When you read this book, do so slowly, thoughtfully, and in the fear of God. If there is something to be repented of, do it, and get on with advancing the kingdom of God.