

# The Myth of a Christian Nation: How the Quest for Political Power Is Destroying the Church

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The Path through Politics Is Not the Road to God When the kingdom of God is manifested, it will wear the face of Jesus Christ. And that, says author Gregory Boyd, has never been true of any earthly government or power. Through close examination of Scripture and lessons drawn from history, Dr. Boyd argues that evangelical Christians who align themselves too closely with political causes or declare that they want to bring America 'back to God' are actually doing harm---both to the body of Christ and society in general. Boyd shows how Jesus taught us to seek a 'power-under' kingdom, where greatness is measured by sacrifice and service. There are no sides or enemies because we are meant to embrace and accept everyone. In The Myth of a Christian Nation, Dr. Boyd challenges readers to return to the true love of Calvary and the message of the cross---setting the 'power-over' politics of worldly government aside.

Gregory A. Boyd is the founder and senior pastor of Woodland Hills Church in St. Paul, Minn., and founder and president of Christus Victor Ministries. He was a professor of theology at Bethel College in Minnesota for sixteen years. Greg is a graduate of the University of Minnesota (BA), Yale Divinity School (M.Div), and Princeton Theological Seminary (PhD). He is a national and international speaker at churches, colleges, conferences, and retreats, and has appeared on numerous radio and television shows. He has also authored and coauthored eighteen books prior to Present Perfect, including The Myth of a Christian Religion, The Myth of a Christian Nation, and his international bestseller Letters from a Skeptic. Learn more at [www.gregboyd.org](http://www.gregboyd.org) SPANISH BIO: Gregory A. Boyd es pastor y fundador de la iglesia Woodland Hills en St. Paul, MN y ademas fundador y presidente del ministerio 'Christus Victor'. Greg tiene una licenciatura de la Universidad de Minnesota, una maestria en Divinidad de la escuela Yale Divinity y un doctorado del Seminario Teologico de Princeton. Ademas, sirvio como profesor de teologia en la Facultad Bethel de Minnesota por dieciseis anos. el es invitado con frecuencia a dictar conferencias en iglesias, retiros y universidades nacionales e internacionales y aprecio en numerosos programas de television y radio. Greg es autor y coautor de varios libros, entre ellos, Dios de lo posible y su exito de ventas, Cartas de un esceptico. Visite

[www.gregboyd.org](http://www.gregboyd.org) para mas informacion. The Myth of a Christian Nation Copyright 2005 by Gregory A. Boyd Requests for information should be addressed to: Zondervan, Grand Rapids, Michigan 49530 Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data Boyd, Gregory A. The myth of a Christian nation : how the quest for political power is destroying the church / Gregory A. Boyd. --- 1st ed. p. cm. Includes bibliographical references. ISBN-13: 978-0-310-26730-0 ISBN-10: 0-310-26730-7 1. Evangelicalism --- United States. 2. Christianity and politics --- United States. 3. Conservatism --- Religious aspects --- Christianity. 4. Kingdom of God. I. Title. BR1642.U5B69 2006 322'.10973 --- dc22 2005030108 All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible, copyrighted 1989 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the United States of America, and are used by permission. All rights reserved. The website addresses recommended throughout this book are offered as a resource to you. These websites are not intended in any way to be or imply an endorsement on the part of Zondervan, nor do we vouch for their content for the life of this book. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means --- electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, or any other --- except for brief quotations in printed reviews, without the prior permission of the publisher. Interior design by Beth

Shagene Printed in the United States of America 06 07 08 09 10 11 12 \* 19 18 17 16 15 14 13 12 11 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 C h a p t e r 1 The Kingdom of the Sword My kingdom is not from this world. John 18:36 The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those in authority over them are called benefactors. But not so with you. Luke 22:25 -- 26 For the church to be a community that does not need war in order to give itself purpose and virtue puts the church at odds with nations. . . . The battle is one we fight with the gospel weapons of witness and love, not violence and coercion. Hauerwas and Willimon<sup>1</sup> Shortly after Jesus' arrest, Pilate asked him, 'Are you the King of the Jews?' (John 18:33). To be a king, one must have a kingdom --- a king's domain --- and Pilate wanted to know if Jesus thought the Jews were his domain. It was a straightforward question, requiring a simple yes or no. But Jesus, typically, did not give the expected response. Rather, he told Pilate that his kingdom 'is not from this world' (John 18:36). Pilate assumed Jesus' kingdom could be understood on the same terms as every other earthly kingdom --- along geographical, ethnic, nationalistic, and ideological lines. But he was mistaken. Jesus' kingdom is radically unlike any kingdom, government, or political ideology in the world. To appreciate Jesus' radically unique kingdom, we need to know about the worldly kingdoms it stands in contrast to. 18 / The Myth of a Christian Nation The 'Power Over' Kingdom Wherever a person or group exercises power over others --- or tries to --- there is a version of the kingdom of the world. While it comes in many forms, the kingdom of the world is in essence a 'power over' kingdom. In some versions --- such as America --- subjects have a say in who their rulers will be, while in others they have none. In some versions, subjects may influence how their rulers exercise power over them --- for example, what laws they will live by --- while in others they do not. There have been democratic, socialist, communist, fascist, and totalitarian versions of the kingdom of the world, but they all share this distinctive characteristic: they exercise 'power over' people. I refer to the power that the kingdom of the world wields as 'the power of the sword.' I'm not referring to a literal sword necessarily --- though that has often been true --- but rather, to the ability of those in power to inflict pain on those who threaten or defy their authority. The power of the sword is the ability to coerce behavior by threats and to make good on those threats when necessary: if a law is broken, you will be punished. Of course, the laws of the different versions of the kingdom of the world vary greatly, but the raised sword behind the laws gives them their power, and that keeps every version of the kingdom of the world intact. Though all versions of the kingdom of the world try to influence how their subjects think and feel, their power resides in their ability to control behavior. As effective as a raised sword is in producing conformity, it cannot bring about an internal change. A kingdom can stipulate that murder will be punished, for example, but it can't change a person's desire to murder. It may be that the only reason a person refrains from killing is because he or she doesn't want to be imprisoned or executed. Their motives may be entirely self-serving. The kingdom of the world doesn't really care, so long as the person conforms to the law. Laws, enforced by the sword, control behavior but cannot change hearts. The Kingdom of the Sword / 19 God and the Kingdom of the World The 'power over' that all versions of the kingdom of the world exercise is not altogether bad. Were the world not fallen, the threat of the sword would be unnecessary. The sword is part of our common curse, yet God uses it to keep law and order in the world. For this reason, followers of Jesus are to be obedient, as far as possible, to whatever government they find in power over them. The apostle Paul puts it this way: Let every person be subject to the governing authorities; for there is no authority

except from God, and those authorities that exist have been instituted [tetagmenai] by God. . . . Rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Do you wish to have no fear of the authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive its approval; for it is God's servant for your good. But if you do what is wrong, you should be afraid, for the authority does not bear the sword in vain! It is the servant of God to execute wrath on the wrongdoer. (Rom. 13:1, 3 -- 4) The government 'does not bear the sword in vain,' therefore, for it is a divine means of keeping fallen people from wreaking havoc on each other. God's intent is to use any given 'power over' government as his 'servant for . . . good.' This doesn't mean that worldly governments are created by God or that governments always use their God-given authority as God intended --- as though Hitler and Stalin were carrying out God's will! Paul rather says that God institutes, directs, or stations (tetagmenai) governments. John Howard Yoder's comment is insightful: God is not said to create or . . . ordain the powers that be, but only to order them, to put them in order, sovereignly to tell them where they belong, what is their place. It is not as if there was a time when there was no government and then God made government through a new creative intervention; 20 / The Myth of a Christian Nation there has been hierarchy and authority and power since human society existed. Its exercise has involved domination, disrespect for human dignity, and real or potential violence ever since sin has existed. Nor is it that by ordering this realm God specifically, morally approves of what a government does. The sergeant does not produce the soldiers he drills; the librarian does not create nor approve of the book she or he catalogs and shelves.

#### Other Books

Balkan Idols, Reporting from the heartland of Yugoslavia in the 1970s, Washington Post correspondent Dusko Doder described "a landscape of Gothic spires, Islamic mosques, and Byzantine domes." A quarter century later, this landscape lay in ruins. In addition to claiming tens of thousands of lives, the former Yugoslavia's four wars ravaged over a thousand religious buildings, many purposefully destroyed by Serbs, Albanians, and Croats alike, providing an apt architectural metaphor for the region's recent history. Rarely has the human impulse toward monocausality--the need for a single explanation--been in greater evidence than in Western attempts to make sense of the country's bloody dissolution. From Robert Kaplan's controversial *Balkan Ghosts*, which identified entrenched ethnic hatreds as the driving force behind Yugoslavia's demise to NATO's dogged pursuit and arrest of Slobodan Milosevic, the quest for easy answers has frequently served to obscure the Balkans' complex history. Perhaps most surprisingly, no book has focused explicitly on the role religion has played in the conflicts that continue to torment southeastern Europe. Based on a wide range of South Slav sources and previously unpublished, often confidential documents from communist state archives, as well as on the author's own on-the-ground experience, *Balkan Idols* explores the political role and influence of Serbian Orthodox, Croatian Catholic, and Yugoslav Muslim religious organizations over the course of the last century. Vjekoslav Perica emphatically rejects the notion that a "clash of civilizations" has played a central role in fomenting aggression. He finds no compelling evidence of an upsurge in religious fervor among the general population. Rather, he concludes, the primary religious players in the conflicts have been activist clergy. This activism, Perica argues, allowed the clergy to assume political power without the accountability faced by democratically-elected officials. What emerges from Perica's account is a deeply nuanced understanding of the history and troubled future of one of

Europes most volatile regions.

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