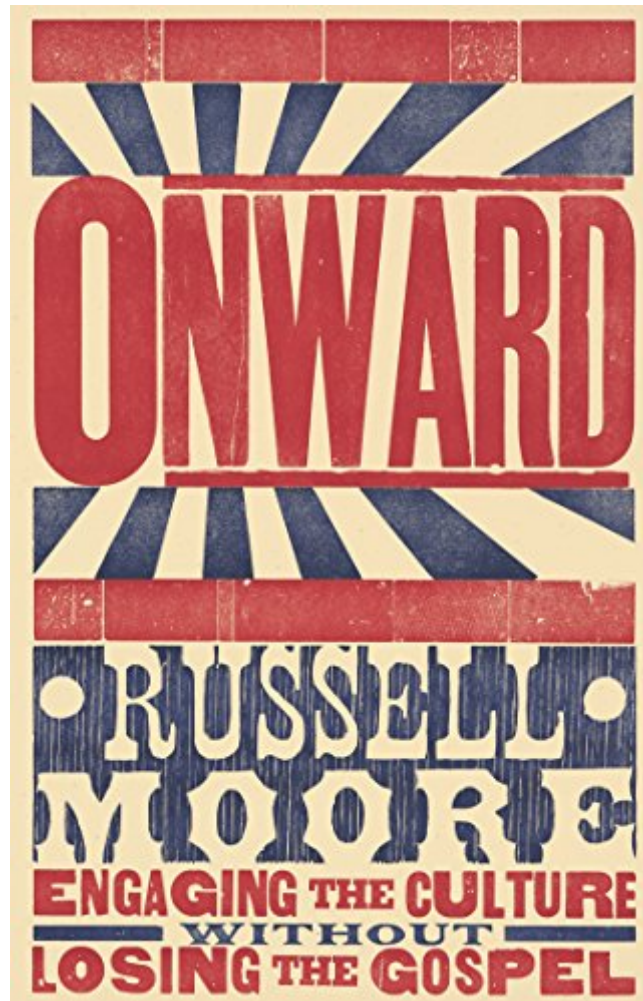


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Onward: Engaging The Culture Without Losing The Gospel



Synopsis

Keep Christianity Strange. As the culture changes all around us, it is no longer possible to pretend that we are a Moral Majority. That may be bad news for America, but it can be good news for the church. What's needed now, in shifting times, is neither a doubling-down on the status quo nor a pullback into isolation. Instead, we need a church that speaks to social and political issues with a bigger vision in mind: that of the gospel of Jesus Christ. As Christianity seems increasingly strange, and even subversive, to our culture, we have the opportunity to reclaim the freakishness of the gospel, which is what gives it its power in the first place. We seek the kingdom of God, before everything else. We connect that kingdom agenda to the culture around us, both by speaking it to the world and by showing it in our churches. As we do so, we remember our mission to oppose demons, not to demonize opponents. As we advocate for human dignity, for religious liberty, for family stability, let's do so as those with a prophetic word that turns everything upside down. The signs of the times tell us we are in for days our parents and grandparents never knew. But that's no call for panic or surrender or outrage. Jesus is alive. Let's act like it. Let's follow him, onward to the future.

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Customer Reviews

I got a letter in the mail today, from a "Christian organization." They were offering me a CD of a new talk that their founder had delivered. The subject was emblazoned on the envelope- "Addressing Today's Moral Slide." I tossed it directly in the trash, annoyed by yet another America-is-riding-towards-hell-in-a-hybrid-car screed. Truth be told, I was annoyed because I've owned that mindset for myself. As an American Christian, I see two main scripts when it comes to addressing my world. One: "Depravity surrounds us! We've lost the youth. The people in power are trying to get rid of God! We've got to take our country back!" And the other: "Just don't look Out There. Just carry on as a nice Christian, and don't let culture wars and politics distract you from shining your tiny light." While one book cannot be a cure-all for an unhealthy worldview, Russell Moore's "Onward" can be a strong first dose of medicinal tonic. And trust me, this is bracing stuff. The subtitle gives you a decent hint- "Engaging the culture without losing the Gospel"- but I think it could have been phrased even better than that. I'd say something like "Engaging the culture because of the Gospel." See, Dr. Moore's book isn't a "Hang onto Jesus while you navigate the alligator-infested waters of modern America" book. It's a "Your Lord is alive forevermore, and your life is hidden in Him. You're also a citizen in a particular country, American, so the Gospel must work through you in your place and time. As walk in Christ's way, how can you understand your world in order to speak His word into it?"

Moore has a message the American Church desperately needs to hear and obeyâ "the Church is a shining City on a Hill; the USA is not. Conflating the two is idolatry. As a Christian educator in predominantly âœright wingâ • circles, I battle this idolatry constantly. On the other hand, there is a reason why this particular kind of idolatry is so widespread in our country. For all of its faults, the colonial churches were zealous for the Kingdom and sought to build all its housesâ "personal, family, church, and stateâ "on the Rock. 150 years later, the pursuit of that root bore fruit: a constitutional federal republic (with limited powers) created to secure individual God-given rights. Not perfectly applied but noble in its ideals and aspirations. In other words, America became an inspiration thanks in large part to the Church. Millions have since come to our shores if not to enjoy the root they certainly have come to partake of the fruit. And therein lies the failure of any reactionary movement intended to âœrestore Judeo-Christian valuesâ • or to âœput God back in governmentâ •. Such efforts are akin to patching a leaky roof on a house with a cracked foundation.

They are human schemes relying on agitation and on acquiring legal and political power to preserve fruit when it is the root that is rotted. Stated another way, these schemes attack the symptoms not the disease. Christian life and liberty is an inside out, bottom up proposition. So, ironically, the best way to "save America" "assuming it can be saved at all" is to seek first the Kingdom. That said, I do not believe we can compartmentalize that effort as easily as Moore implies.

I enjoyed reading an advanced copy of *Onward: Engaging the Culture Without Losing the Gospel* by Russell Moore. The book begins with a few chapters summarizing the increasing secularization in the United States (and even in the Bible belt itself), as evangelicals have shifted "from moral majority to prophetic minority." Moore then explains how the already, not-yet nature of the kingdom of God means that our priority, as individual Christians and as churches, should be the reconciliation of sinners to God not the subjugation of those who (sometimes vehemently) disagree with us. The next chapter does a great job explaining how the culture war, in a sense, is nothing new: Going all the way back to the days of Jesus, true Christianity has always been strange and freakish relative to the wider culture. Moore writes: The church is not to be walled up from the broader culture but to speak to it (2 Pet. 2:12), but that can only happen if, as sojourners and exiles, we have something distinctive to say (2 Pet. 2:11). We are called to "proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness," but we can only do so if we remember that we are "a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession" (2 Pet. 2:9). As the church, we're to bear witness "to what the whole universe will one day look like." The latter chapters address how Christians should think address some of the pressing issues of our day--human dignity, religious liberty, and family stability--not with an "us-versus-them" mindset but from a disposition of "convictional kindness," seeking to be faithful to the truth and winsome to the lost. A few parts I underlined: With regard to boycotts, "Let others fight Mammon with Mammon."

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