

Russell Moore: The Religious Right Can Be Saved

“A religious right that is not able to tie public action and cultural concern to a theology of gospel and mission will die and will deserve to die.” –Russell Moore

In this year’s Erasmus Lecture at First Things, Russell Moore offers a striking critique of the religious right of decades past and present, pointing the way toward a renewal in public theology and a revitalization of Christian institutions.

Alas, while many the movement’s conversations have often focused on key issues and the right high-level policy aims, far too often, it has suffered from a narrow theological imagination and an increasingly cynical political pragmatism. As a result, we’ve found ourselves reaching for narrow policy wins and waging gruesome short-term political combat at the cost of clear gospel witness and long-term culture-level action and institution-building.

As Moore concludes, a renewed religious right will require a more holistic and generational view of human flourishing and the people of God—one that doesn’t forget or neglect the heart of the gospel or confuse it with moralism and political privilege:

The religious right can be saved, but not just with tinkering around the edges. Religious conservatives will need a robust religion and a sense of what is in fact to be conserved. This will mean abandoning the idea of a moral majority or a silent majority within the nation, and building instead collaborative majorities, often issue by issue. It will mean institutions that have the vision and financial resources to play a long game of cultural renewal and persuasion not driven merely by the populist passions of the moment.

More than that, it will mean a religious conservatism that sees the church as more important than the state, the conscience as more important than the culture, and knows the difference between the temporal and the eternal. We will make mistakes. We will need course corrections. We have to remind ourselves constantly that we are not inquisitors but missionaries, and that we can be Americans best when we are not Americans first. But we must always keep in mind that we are always being overheard in our statements and in our silences.

Listen to the entire lecture. {eoa}

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