

Religion and Politics in Presidential Elections: The Toxic Influence of Religion in Recent Presidential Elections

Victor Wan-Tatah

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Victor Wan-Tatah has written a timely book, *Religion and Politics in Presidential Elections*, where he addresses what he considers to be the blurred boundaries between religion and politics and discusses the power that religion exerts on presidential politics.

Wan-Tatah dissects the anatomy of Christian fundamentalism and examines the rise of conservative evangelical religion in America. He discusses the genesis and financing of fundamentalist groups, their history and political purpose, and their contribution to conservatism. He also outlines the history and function of religious groups like the Moral Majority of the late Jerry Falwell, the Christian Broadcasting Network of Pat Robertson, and the Focus on the Family of James Dobson, as well as the politically conservative Tea Party movement.

The author's conclusion calls for acknowledgment of the diversity of religions and political points of view, and advocates for guidance by ethics rather than by greed and power.

The main drawback of this book is that the author's position on his subject is evident throughout. For example, Wan-Tatah blasts the Tea Party, with its claims to a lost Christian past, as a destabilizing influence in American politics. He charges that the alliance of the Tea Party with the Republican Party has created a new way of justifying an extremist ideology.

Wan-Tatah extends his assault on fundamentalist organizations by targeting a Christian group called The Family, which also goes by the name of The Fellowship. The group is secretive, yet holds a high-profile prayer breakfast once a year in Washington, D.C., which is often attended by US presidents. The group has been criticized as having too much influence on politics in the United States. Wan-Tatah calls The Family the last outpost of the religious right and a hypocritical organization that covers up blatant sexual indiscretions—a reference to sex scandals involving former Sen. John Ensign and former South Carolina Gov. Mark Sanford, both of whom lived at The Family's Washington house.

Thoroughly researched and written with a style that is graceful, clear, and incisive, Wan-Tatah offers a no-holds-barred critique of the evolution of the religious right and its effect on American politics—especially on the 2008 and 2012 elections. That said, had the author been more neutral in presenting the facts, he would have allowed readers to come to their own conclusions.

Overall, this volume will likely appeal to a left wing audience and might make an enlightening and controversial read for anyone who is interested in deciphering the relationship between politics and religion in America.

Wan-Tatah is a Harvard graduate and a professor of Philosophy and Religious Studies at Youngstown State University in Ohio. He is also the director of Youngstown's Africana Studies Program.

RICHARD SKAFF (May 30, 2013)

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