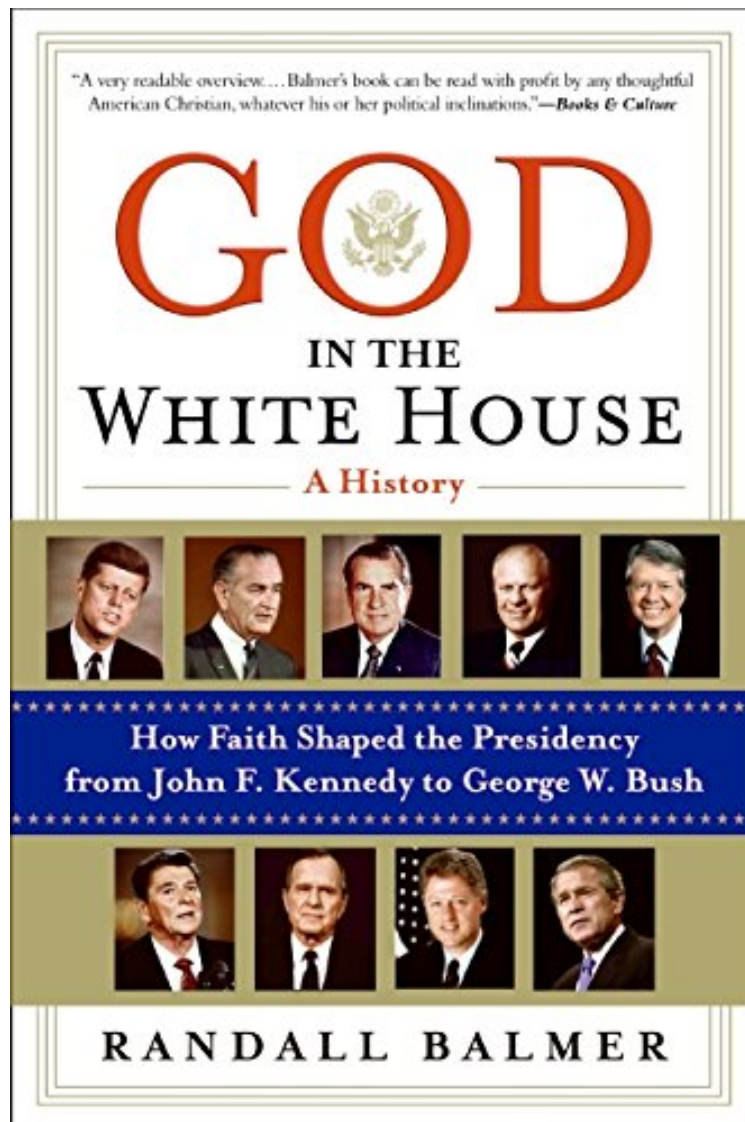


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God in the White House: A History: How Faith Shaped the Presidency from John F. Kennedy to George W. Bush

Randall Balmer

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Randall Balmer : God in the White House: A History: How Faith Shaped the Presidency from John F. Kennedy to George W. Bush before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised God in the White House: A History: How Faith Shaped the Presidency from John F. Kennedy to George W. Bush:

48 of 49 people found the following review helpful. Interesting Look at the Attitudes and Perceptions of the Public in

Electing Presidents By Frederick S. Goethel While this is a relatively slim volume in size, similar to a lengthy essay, it is packed with fascinating information and insights into the role God and religion have played in presidential elections since 1960. Beginning with the campaign of John F. Kennedy and ending with the presidency of George W. Bush, the book compares the various religious philosophies of the presidents and how that was perceived by the public. One of the strongest ironies to appear in the book, and a theme that runs throughout, is the change in religious attitudes over the past 48 years. For instance, many religious leaders were opposed to Kennedy because they feared he would weaken the separation between Church and State, which was a fundamental principal of the Baptist religion. Yet, by the time Reagan was elected, the Church had discovered power and was hoping to lower the bar set between the two. In further irony, Reagan was the least religious of the three candidates, and had one of the most liberal records, yet could speak "the language" of the Religious Right more eloquently than the other candidates. The author often refers to speeches given by the candidates and Presidents to make his case. To help the reader understand the positions of the candidates, the author has reprinted seven of the most important speeches by the candidates in the appendix. This is a well written book containing interesting information on the views of those who have led the nation. I think it is an important book for this election cycle and will give readers a new way to evaluate what they are being told from the stump. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Oftentimes repetitive, but taught me a lot. By myself I had to read this book as a part of my history class in college. And I must say, I never really knew to what extent religion and politics were related until this book came along. I always assumed that our government was just supposed to be secular, and everyone who tried to co-mingle them was wrong. Yet this book really taught me that religion shapes a person, and that shapes the presidency. The last 60 years of political conflict can easily be explained by the religious swings in America and the White House, and this book does an excellent job showing it. It opened my eyes, I must say. Why does it get 4 stars? Well... it can get repetitive. A few of the presidents were similar in religious backgrounds, yet they each got an equal portion of the book. The major swings of religion were very well explained though. But then there would be a few presidencies without change. I still recommend it though. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. A must read By Will This short book reveals realities vital to the existence of a free society. I have studied the founding fathers most of my life. The current radical religious right is more of a threat to our republic and the values of our founders than communism ever was. There is nothing more lethal to a republic or democracy than the poison of mingling civil government with religion. This book explains why wrapping our Presidential candidates in a blanket of perceived piety doesn't work. We expect perfect piety from them while lacking it ourselves.

How did we go from John F. Kennedy declaring that religion should play no role in the elections to Bush saying, "I believe that God wants me to be president"? Historian Randall Balmer takes us on a tour of presidential religiosity in the last half of the twentieth century from Kennedy's 1960 speech that proposed an almost absolute wall between American political and religious life to the soft religiosity of Lyndon B. Johnson's Great Society; from Richard Nixon's manipulation of religion to fit his own needs to Gerald Ford's quiet stoicism; from Jimmy Carter's introduction of evangelicalism into the mainstream to Ronald Reagan's co-option of the same group; from Bill Clinton's covert way of turning religion into a non-issue to George W. Bush's overt Christian messages, Balmer reveals the role religion has played in the personal and political lives of these American presidents. Americans were once content to disregard religion as a criterion for voting, as in most of the modern presidential elections before Jimmy Carter. But today's voters have come to expect candidates to fully disclose their religious views and to deeply illustrate their personal relationship to the Almighty. God in the White House explores the paradox of Americans' expectation that presidents should simultaneously trumpet their religious views and relationship to God while supporting the separation of church and state. Balmer tells the story of the politicization of religion in the last half of the twentieth century, as well as the "religionization" of our politics. He reflects on the implications of this shift, which have reverberated in both our religious and political worlds, and offers a new lens through which to see not only these extraordinary individuals, but also our current political situation.

From Publishers Weekly How did personal faith go from something John F. Kennedy needed to distance himself from to something recent presidential candidates have been eager to embrace publicly? Balmer, an eminent historian and first-rate storyteller, recounts familiar material in a way that's fresh. He wisely suggests that genuine blame for misuse of religion in public rests with voters, not politicians. But a running quarrel with the religious right unannounced in the title seems the real *raison d'être* for this book, and many arguments and examples will be familiar to readers of the author's *Thy Kingdom Come*. Balmer marshals impressive evidence that the religious right arose in reaction to government interference with racist religious schools. But he often tends to overstate and sometimes omits key facts. Balmer traces the right's slow response to 1973's *Roe v. Wade* decision by quoting the Southern Baptist Convention's initial support of *Roe*, without noting that the takeover of that church by fundamentalists came later and largely over that issue. Most oddly, Balmer describes the war in Iraq as America's first aggressive military campaign in history. These eccentricities make the book feel agenda-driven, and render questionable even its many points of wisdom. (Mar.) Copyright Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. From

Booklist Balmer very readably chronicles the use of religion in presidential campaigns and political apologetics since John F. Kennedys campaign speech assuring voters that his Catholicism wouldnt affect his presidential conduct at all. When pressed, Kennedys three immediate successors explained their actions by the Golden Rule, though Nixon and Ford also had preacher friends (Billy Graham for Nixon, Bill Zeoli for Ford) tender excuses. Carter used born-again status to woo voters wearied by the Watergate scandal, but he was no hypocrite; indeed, the sincerity of his concern for the national soul in his 1979 Crisis of Confidence or malaise address, which now seems clairvoyant, made him seem more pastor than president and sparked the aggressively political religious Right to (re)action. Subsequent campaigns and presidents have flaunted religiosity, but the agendas of religious politicians, especially the religious Rights, remain unrealized after 30 years of hectoring. Religious journalist Balmer concludes a hitherto reportorial book by holding voters but not the sensation-seeking media ultimately responsible for Americas political immorality. Thus, an excellent historical précis ends in, at best, an incomplete explanation. --Ray Olson Balmer traces the cultures journey from the days of Kennedy and his famous speech promising to keep religion out of politics to George W. Bush touting explicitly for believers votes . . . Balmer wisely counsels skepticism that candidates religious statements foretell moral governance. (The Boston Globe) A thoughtful analysis of the nine presidents from Kennedy to George W. Bush. Balmer contends that no clear connection exists between a presidents faith and personal morality and his policies. . . Balmers critique of American Christians self-delusion and hubris is commendable. (Books Culture)