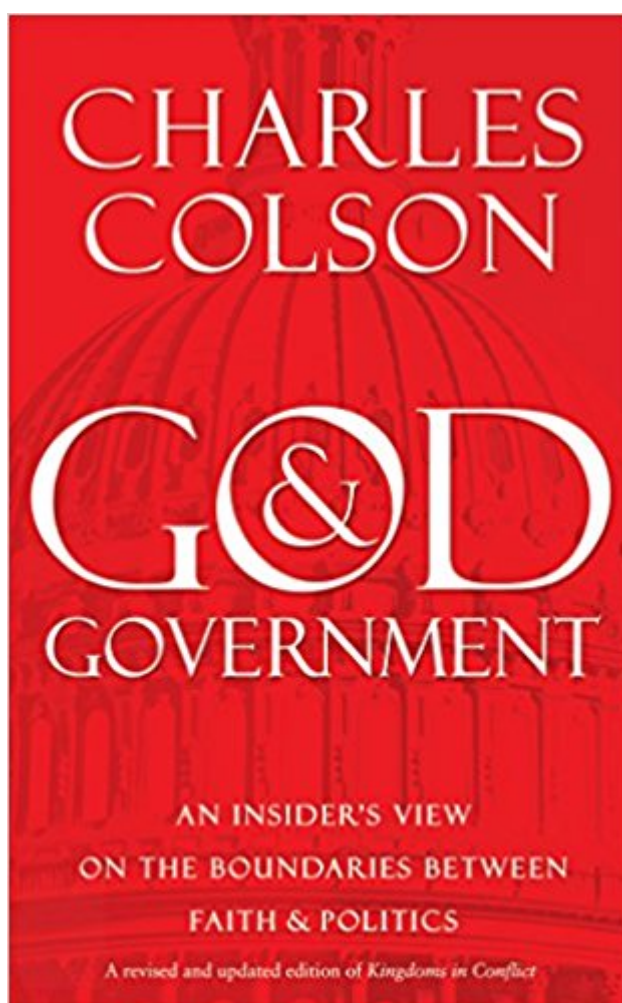


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# God & Government: An Insider's View On The Boundaries Between Faith & Politics



## Synopsis

How should Christians live their faith in the public arena? Twenty years ago, the first edition of Chuck Colson's *Kingdoms in Conflict* became a bestseller, a must-read for people interested in politics and the relationship between church and state. Now, with a passion for truth and moved by the urgency of the times we live in, Colson has written *God and Government*, re-voicing his powerful and enduring message for our post-9/11 world. In an era when Christianity is being attacked from every side—books being written charging Christians with being theocrats and trying to impose their views on an unwilling culture—what is the message of the Christian church? What does the Bible say, and what do we learn from history about the proper relationship between faith and culture? Appealing to scripture, reason, and history, this book tackles society's most pressing and divisive issues. New stories and examples reflect the realities of today, from the clash with radical Islam to the deep division between "reds" and "blues." In an era of angry finger-pointing, Colson furnishes a unique insider's perspective that can't be pigeonholed as either "religious right" or "religious left." Whatever your political or religious stance, this book will give you a different understanding of Christianity. If you're a Christian, it will help you to both examine and defend your faith. If you've been critical of the new religious right, you'll be shocked at what you learn. Probing both secular and religious values, *God and Government* critiques each fairly, sides with neither, and offers a hopeful, fair-minded perspective that is sorely needed in today's hyper-charged atmosphere.

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## Customer Reviews

How should Christians live their faith in the public arena? Twenty years ago, the first edition of Chuck Colson's *Kingdoms in Conflict* became a bestseller, a must-read for people interested in politics and the relationship between church and state. Now, with a passion for truth and moved by the urgency of the times we live in, Colson has written *God and Government*, re-voicing his powerful and enduring message for our post-9/11 world. In an era when Christianity is being attacked from every side---books being written charging Christians with being theocrats and trying to impose their views on an unwilling culture---what is the message of the Christian church? What does the Bible say, and what do we learn from history about the proper relationship between faith and culture? Appealing to scripture, reason, and history, this book tackles society's most pressing and divisive issues. New stories and examples reflect the realities of today, from the clash with radical Islam to the deep division between 'reds' and 'blues.' In an era of angry finger-pointing, Colson furnishes a unique insider's perspective that can't be pigeonholed as either 'religious right' or 'religious left.' Whatever your political or religious stance, this book will give you a different understanding of Christianity. If you're a Christian, it will help you to both examine and defend your faith. If you've been critical of the new religious right, you'll be shocked at what you learn. Probing both secular and religious values, *God and Government* critiques each fairly, sides with neither, and offers a hopeful, fair-minded perspective that is sorely needed in today's hyper-charged atmosphere. --This text refers to an alternate Audio CD edition.

Charles Colson, well-known syndicated columnist, author, and international speaker, is founder of Prison Fellowship and host of the daily radio commentary BreakPoint. An honors graduate of Brown University and George Washington Law School, he served from 1969 to 1973 as special counsel to President Richard M. Nixon. Colson's articles appear in national secular and Christian magazines. He has written twenty-five books, the most recent of which is *The Good Life*. Charles Colson donates the royalties from his books to Prison Fellowship.

A book can be a good way to gather a fuller story of one's faith, obtain a more balanced opinion of someone's biography and in the case of Christian values in politics, correct the misleading voices that twist the reality of the former two. Once an insider to some of politics' most devious strategies, the late Charles Colson wrote with personal conviction and general accountability to anyone,

everyone who might criticize, demonize or even falsely glorify the purpose of Jesus' teachings in the public square. On the spectrum of academic to philosophical, "Kingdoms in Conflict" falls somewhere in the middle, based on the reasoning of popular Christian authors like: C.S. Lewis, Francis Schaeffer, Richard John Neuhaus, G. K. Chesterton, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Peter Berger and many others. On the spectrum of theory and practice, Colson used the example of Christians in major historical movements like the abolishing of slavery, the reaction to Nazism and the resistance to Communism to conclude a more practical argument. The vivid and sometimes heartbreaking accounts of God's Kingdom in practice still do not solidify a political theory. But perhaps Jesus never intended His power to be limited by human categorization. Before politics, we need spiritual redemption. Colson not only began with a little of his own personal testimony but spent the first chapters debating an argument in a case for Jesus Christ. "If God is dead or irrelevant - then the prospect for true harmony and justice is grim (pg. 71)." Religion does not enable politics nor does religion need politics but the political efforts towards harmony and justice are all but impossible without a spiritual cornerstone. As has been done by many others, the book argued that America's founding fathers understood and intended this same interpretation of religion and politics. Two warnings would seek to correct any radical misconception of faith and politics. The first is that the church is not merely a platform through which to seek social justice. A church that exchanges its conviction to truth and the primary gospel mission for... anything else, not only loses its spiritual compass but, as has been documented since, will crumble at the seams. Jesus worked miracles, healed the sick, defended the poor and embraced the social outcasts. But it was not for any of these efforts that Jesus was once threatened with stoning and later, was nailed to a cross (John 10: 32-33). Chuck Colson's second warning was clear. Religious leaders, pastors, priests, clergy, should remain outside of political office and if any religious leader would want to run for office, they should remove themselves first from the religious congregation they lead. The church and the minister's highest priority is the gospel. Combining political and religious office is too easily manipulated. There is even a law in America, if for the wrong reasons (and in current review), that prohibits many tax-free organizations from overt political statements. Laws rarely change the heart of man. In fact too often they prescribe merely what one can get away with. Clergy can prove principled restraint in favor of a higher calling, especially so when there is no law that demands such restraint. Perhaps the most outstanding feature of "Kingdoms in Conflict" is Colson's repeated image of a global church. When reading a work of political theology or religion in politics, it is instructive to ask yourself "would a Ugandan, Bolivian, Jordanian, Malaysian or Korean understand and be able to culturally apply the same principle to their context?" To be sure, the Christian West publishes the majority of Christian

literature. It is to be expected that an American author would place America at the center of their religious analysis. Instead, Colson described the work of God's Kingdom through a number of international examples, many of which focus on prison ministry, his own experiences in the power of reconciliation. Some countries have a strong vision of compassion, their laws arguably founded more closely on Biblical principles of love and justice. As argued by Augustine all the way down to Martin Luther, Christians can and should be the best citizens. Their patriotism and civic-mindedness knows the Law behind the law (pg 237). "Christian patriots spend more time washing feet than waving flags. Ideally, flags should not even be thought of as symbols of military and economic might, but of the common good of the specific people a sovereign God has called them to serve (pg 251)." "The "conflict" arises as good Christians exercise their right and privilege to serve in political office. State law is not an excuse to impose theonomy. At the other extreme, politics too easily impresses one with corrupting power. We live and work, as Colson described, in competing spheres of influence where our character is tempted to power and pride. "...Nothing distinguishes the kingdoms of man from the Kingdom of God more than their diametrically opposed views of the exercise of power. One seeks to control people, the other to serve people; one promotes self, the other prostrates self; one seeks the prestige and position; the other lifts up the lowly and despised (pg. 274)." "The earthly kingdom's borders based on law, lineage, language and land are flexible structures. Only one of the two Christian "citizenships" is of lasting value. One of Colson's most enlightening revelations, fiercely argued, is that Biblical wisdom does not ensure political success. In fact, Biblical wisdom concludes that while there is much need for Christians in politics, those same Christians have a responsibility to their moral convictions that might lead some to a voluntary exit from politics. Politics demands and requires creativity. Marvelous creativity, even political wisdom can fall prey to the temptations of corrupting political power and the constant gnawing to please rather than to serve. This word hits closest to home for government administrations who cater to one religious contingent but act contrary to its morals and values. In such an environment, how and to what extent are Christians to serve with clear conscience, especially as political appointees? Despite Colson's clear injunctions on faith in national politics, there is one area of political science where it would seem theory remains the only instructor to Christian practice: International Relations (IR). Professors such as Dean Curry have used some of the same political themes of Colson's to construct a framework for Christian thinking in IR. But he, like most, would still warn against a comprehensive Christian theory. To be fair, Colson did not write a book on Christians in international politics. But his few comments on the matter reveal an interesting twist to his general position. International relations is often an exercise in locating and acting on the oft-cited lesser evil, as Colson argued. His primary leadership example

also happened to be the poster-child of the perfect "Pagan Ethos" brand of leadership where faith must not hinder the pragmatic and realist demands of international engagements (Robert Kaplan, 2003). Colson also has little good to say about the United Nations; whose empty spiritual soul hinders the organization from achieving anything of lasting moral value. Colson's 2007 publication on the same topic should be the follow-up to the ideas in this book, the latter as a check and balance many political trends of the 1960s to 1980s. One such example was Colson's response to the Moral Majority movement. One thing the Moral Majority movement did achieve, amongst its many missteps in false humility and divisive tactics, was to encourage Americans to be more involved in politics. Political commentators in the first two decades of the new millennium continue to correct similar themes of political over-reaching and political ignorance. A good recent example is Michael Wear (2017), formerly on president Obama's religious affairs team. Community is meant to inform and uplift political processes, not the other way around. From community springs the most genuine defense of human rights. From community springs the most active form of social justice and social service. Even if Colson questioned the UN potential to further human rights, the greatest hindrance may be of our own cultural design. A "cardinal rule of American life" is becoming less and less one of service and instead a preoccupation of "the right to personal autonomy (pg. 208). More than twenty years later, in 2017, Michael Gerson, who has served at the national level in politics as a man of faith would say the same thing.

I gave this one 4 stars because I had just finished reading Colson's "Loving God" which I could not put down. Kingdoms in conflict has an excellent, researched account of just how Hitler organized his take down - appealing to the youth, and attacking the church's right to worship as they wished. The early persecution carved church membership from 18,000 people at the first meeting to just a few hundred. There were some great saints who died in concentration camps, some after years of torture. I see so many similarities to what is happening to our government and church right now. This book dovetails nicely with Roger Oakland's "Faith Undone" - which offers some chilling insights about our immediate future. I like how Colson brings in many famous thoughts from atheists as well as believers and uses them all in a positive way to make his points. His position is that the church should never become involved with the government, and he gives many historical examples of what happened when the church capitulated to the state. It was always disastrous. It is a faith-strengthening book.

Excellent historic background of the church resistance to both Nazi and post WWII Communism. Also

good review of how post WWII philosophy and lack of good church leadership lead to our present ultra liberal, situational ethics and departure from a positive value standard. Highly recommended. Backed by extensive references.

This book is written by some one who is extremely intelligent and who has "been there" on the inside Washington track. The author is also a dedicated Christian, American and family man. This book makes you think about why you feel the way you do about God and government and I honestly have to reconsider the way I have looked at things over the past couple of decades.

Still reading but pretty fascinating!

Great book. As relevant today as it was when it was written.

Excellent read

An outstanding analysis of difficult topic in an easy-to-read format. Colson can see through the eyes of someone who has worked in the office of the president of the U.S. - very thought provoking.

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