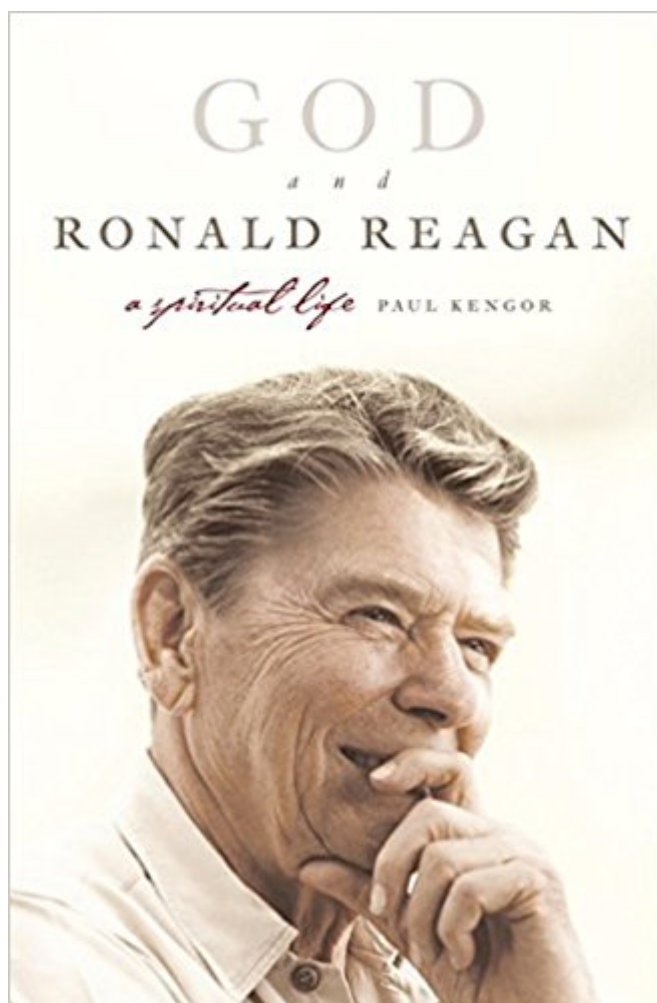


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God And Ronald Reagan: A Spiritual Life



Synopsis

Ronald Reagan is hailed today for a presidency that restored optimism to America, engendered years of economic prosperity, and helped bring about the fall of the Soviet Union. Yet until now little attention has been paid to the role Reagan's personal spirituality played in his political career, shaping his ideas, bolstering his resolve, and ultimately compelling him to confront the brutal -- and, not coincidentally, atheistic -- Soviet empire. In this groundbreaking book, political historian Paul Kengor draws upon Reagan's legacy of speeches and correspondence, and the memories of those who knew him well, to reveal a man whose Christian faith remained deep and consistent throughout his more than six decades in public life. Raised in the Disciples of Christ Church by a devout mother with a passionate missionary streak, Reagan embraced the church after reading a Christian novel at the age of eleven. A devoted Sunday-school teacher, he absorbed the church's model of "practical Christianity" and strived to achieve it in every stage of his life. But it was in his lifelong battle against communism -- first in Hollywood, then on the political stage -- that Reagan's Christian beliefs had their most profound effect. Appalled by the religious repression and state-mandated atheism of Bolshevik Marxism, Reagan felt called by a sense of personal mission to confront the USSR. Inspired by influences as diverse as C.S. Lewis, Whittaker Chambers, and Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, he waged an openly spiritual campaign against communism, insisting that religious freedom was the bedrock of personal liberty. "The source of our strength in the quest for human freedom is not material, but spiritual," he said in his Evil Empire address. "And because it knows no limitation, it must terrify and ultimately triumph over those who would enslave their fellow man." From a church classroom in 1920s Dixon, Illinois, to his triumphant mission to Moscow in 1988, Ronald Reagan was both political leader and spiritual crusader. God and Ronald Reagan deepens immeasurably our understanding of how these twin missions shaped his presidency -- and changed the world.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This engaging if hagiographic study argues the seemingly obvious point that the former President's outlook was shaped by his religious beliefs. Political scientist and Hoover Institution fellow Kengor has pored over Reagan's letters and speeches to glean examples of his faith, from his youth as a Disciples of Christ stalwart and Sunday school teacher to his 1988 trip to Moscow, where he lectured Communists from Gorbachev on down on the importance of religious freedom. More devotional than scholarly, Kengor's treatment emphasizes the ex-president's affinities with evangelical Protestantism; Reagan "invited Christ into his life," acknowledged God's "special plan" for him, believed in end-times prophecy and even had his presidency foretold by the Holy Spirit during a prayer circle. Readers troubled by reports of astrology at the Reagan White House are assured that it determined scheduling, not policy, and that only Nancy was really into it. Kengor accepts the links Reagan himself drew between his religious beliefs and his politics, on social issues like school prayer, sex education, and abortion, and most importantly on his anti-Communism, which harped on Soviet religious persecution and consistently identified atheism as Communism's original sin. But the spiritual rootedness Kengor highlights is not exactly of Gandhian proportions. As he too briefly acknowledges, many of Reagan's pious formulations, like the "shining city on a hill" motif and the imprecations against Communist godlessness, were commonplaces of America's "civil religion." In other words, sometimes it's hard to tell where spirituality ends and rhetoric begins.

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"A profound character study, an engrossing work of history...a heartbreakingly beautiful love story about one man and his Maker." (Peter Robinson, Reagan speechwriter and author of *How Ronald Reagan Changed My Life*) "Paul Kengor now reveals the inner heart and soul of this great man." (Judge William P. Clark, National Security Advisor, Reagan Administration) "Paul Kengor takes the reader to depths where no other writer has yet been." (Ronald Reagan, "his very soul." (Peter Schweizer, author of *Reagan's War*) "God and Ronald Reagan fundamentally transforms the historical view of

Ronald Reagan and his place in the 20th century. (Donald M. Goldstein, co-author of *At Dawn We Slept*) "Paul Kengor has performed a masterful service by shining a light on this underappreciated but central aspect of Reagan's life. (Steven F. Hayward, author of *The Age of Reagan*) "[A] superb book no interpretation of Ronald Reagan will be complete without reference to this vital work. (Stephen Knott, Ronald Reagan Oral History Project, University of Virginia) "In this meticulously researched and insightful book, Paul Kengor finds the ultimate source of Ronald Reagan's resolve against communism. (Andrew E. Busch, author of *Ronald Reagan and the Politics of Freedom*) "God and Ronald Reagan deepens our understanding of Reagan's life and the times in which he governed. (Matthew Dallek, author of *The Right Moment: Ronald Reagan's First Victory and the Decisive Turning Point in American Politics*) "Illuminates the role of faith in the life and worldview of one of the 20th century's most important figures. (Rich Lowry, editor-in-chief, *National Review*) "Illuminates the role of faith in the life and worldview of one of the 20th century's most important figures. (Lee Edwards, Distinguished Fellow, Heritage Foundation, and author of *Ronald Reagan: A Political Biography*) "Paul Kengor has written an excellent book which explores a previously neglected aspect of Reagan's life his religious faith. (Edwin Meese III, Reagan administration Attorney General) "In the vast body of Reagan scholarship, what's been missing is a spiritual biography. Kengor has admirably supplied our need. (Robert P. George, Princeton University) "A penetrating history of the President's evolving religious faith and its articulation in different settings during his career. (Kenneth W. Thompson, University of Virginia) "Paul Kengor offers not only a thorough history of Reagan's religious development but a good and sardonic eye for detail. (Marvin Olasky, professor, University of Texas at Austin and editor-in-chief of *World* magazine) "Paul Kengor's book offers a deeper understanding than can be found in any of the conventional academic literature. (Hugh Heclo, Robinson Professor of Public Affairs, George Mason University) "For anyone who believes Christianity and politics don't mix needs to read this work on an American president. (David A. Noebel, Summit Ministries) "God and Ronald Reagan makes an important contribution to our understanding of the last major president of the 20th century. (Ryan J. Barilleaux, Miami University of Ohio) "The conservative Christian who rarely went to church. That is the conundrum most pundits used to refer to Ronald Reagan when discussing his relationship to religion.

God and Ronald Reagan helps us finally come to grips with the man and the presidency that was Ronald Reagan. From childhood to the Cold War, Paul Kengor has unearthed the Ronald Reagan most of us knew was there but which few of us had the chance to see. Enjoyable and enlightening.

— Gary L. Gregg, Ph.D., Mitch McConnell Chair in Leadership, director, McConnell Center for Political Leadership, University of Louisville

“Paul Kengor has addressed a critical issue in today’s study of the American Presidency: how religious background influences presidential decisions. This is a book particularly important to presidential scholars who are assessing President George W. Bush and how he too has interwoven his political and religious beliefs in presidential decisions.”

— Shirley Anne Warshaw, Professor, Department of political science, Gettysburg College)

God and Ronald Reagan loved, loved, loved this book. Paul Kengor did an excellent job portraying how much President Reagan’s Christianity meant to him. It was wonderful to hear about President Reagan’s faith, and only confirmed to me how underrated his life and Presidential terms were. If only we had political leaders now with the same faith, character and leadership abilities. How much better off this country would be. The book was well written and very informative. Thanks Paul Kengor for a wonderful biography of President Reagan.

I never knew what a strong Christian Ronald Reagan was. This book was a real eye-opener; my appreciation for Reagan and his service has increased a thousand-fold. His faith was so strong and clearly stood behind everything he did. It was the guiding force in his life and I never knew it. Thank you, Paul Kengor!

I never knew that President Reagan was such a committed Christian, determined to carry the message of Christ’s love to all mankind including the atheist regime in Russia, until I had the opportunity to read this book. He was both bold and persuasive in carrying his message directly to the Russian people as well as their leaders.

This is a really good book. My 16 year old read it for school reading, and from our discussions, it has made an impact in his life.

I am only halfway through the book, but I thought I would give it a "halfway" review. It is very interesting on just how good a man he was before becoming president. A lot of things I did not know

about his earlier life, but I have to say that the writing is a bit "long in the tooth". I think that this book could have been half the size with still all the information intact. I just hope some of the questions that I have from the first half of the book are addressed in the second half. I'll weigh in once I'm finished, and maybe I will change my rating. Not sorry I purchased, just thinking it is a little long and I'm only halfway through.

There was a lot of very interesting information on how Ronald Reagan became the man he became as President. It also answered the questions on why he did and said the things he did while President. The author's style of presenting the information sometimes became tiring to read. However, the revelations on President Reagan's strengths and the use of those strengths to overcome the USSR added to a basic belief that he was the man needed at that perilous time. He was in many minds "God's choice to smite the Soviet Union."

Well written and researched. A great reminder of some of President Reagan's best qualities as a man and a leader. An important review of his goals and objectives for America - many (most) of which remain critical, perhaps even more critical, in today's political climate. I heartily recommend this read encourage serious contemplation of the life principles Ronald Reagan embraced.

This is a great book.

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