

in Iraq. It doesn't seem to occur to him that these same problems might crop up once we're patrolling the streets of Tehran—which, as you'll recall, we'll reach in “a few weeks.” He devotes a whole half-sentence to the issue of our overextended military and then manages to turn it into a positive for us by pointing out that our troops will have a much shorter trip! “Skeptics within the United States as well as worldwide will argue that an invasion of Iran will overstretch the US military and prove too costly to undertake. Yet, with US military force levels currently being reduced in Iraq, redeployment to Iran is more achievable now, possibly even less costly than it would be should forces deployed from Iraq be fully repositioned at home.”

Sure, that's the ticket! We'll just tell those National Guard units who have already stayed in the Baghdad shooting gallery far past their designated time that we're repositioning them a little further to the northeast, specifically to Tehran. Just think of the savings when we tell them they don't even get to go home in between. Boy will they be happy!

That passage is typical of the odd callousness toward American soldiers Evans shows throughout the book. He's so convinced that God is on his and Menachem Begin's side that he never considers what it would cost America to launch this suicidal attack on Iran while trying to manage Iraq and Afghanistan. He just doesn't care about any country on earth except Israel. His only worry is that “an attack on Iran might further destabilize the Middle East, such that Israel's ultimate survival is even more at risk...”

Wait, what? “Israel's ultimate survival”? Dude, what about America? Ever worry what a failed invasion of Iran would do to America's “ultimate survival”? Clearly not. America, which he's eager to send into the meat grinder, is not even on Evans's agenda. ■

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[*Tempting Faith: An Inside Story of Political Seduction*, David Kuo, Free Press, 283 pages]

David Out of the Lions' Den

by Doug Bandow

THE RELIGIOUS RIGHT has long targeted those many Christians have seen as the devil's political helpers—Bill Clinton, Ted Kennedy, People for the American Way, the American Civil Liberties Union. Of late, David Kuo has joined that list.

A Christian political activist who worked for the National Right to Life Committee, Bill Bennett's Empower America, the CIA, a Christian charity, and the Bush administration's Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives, Kuo is an unusual addition to the list. But Kuo has criticized administration officials and evangelical politicians, earning him the enmity of both.

Tempting Faith is one of those rare Washington books that is worth reading—clearly written, disarmingly honest, thoughtfully introspective, and unusually substantive. We are enriched as we learn about Kuo the person as well as his involvement in Christian politics.

Kuo was a high-school convert to Christianity who got excited about political activism in college. He found it easier to advocate theology than to apply it. He notes with unusual candor, “I had never thought much about abortion until my girlfriend had one.” It's not a line that most religious conservatives would use. Explained Kuo, “Jesus was no match for my hormones.”

Despite some liberal impulses—Kuo interned for Sen. Ted Kennedy (D-Mass.) for instance—his religious enthusiasm soon led him into the conservative political hive. Kuo writes, “The biggest surprise for me in my new church was learning that our Christian faith presupposed a common political agenda.” Opposition to abortion and gay rights

were bedrocks. “My political education didn't stop there. I learned that Christians were absolutely pro-capitalism and that meant taxes were bad and always needed to be cut,” he notes.

Today a more mature and sober Kuo writes, “Ironically, opposing sin became a sort of substitute for pursuing God. Opposing political parties is very easy when compared to some of Jesus' daunting challenges.” As he explains, “Jesus required my life. Politics required only my attention. And I really, really loved politics.”

Yet Kuo discovered that love threatened to subvert his commitment to the poor—which originally brought him into politics. He didn't like what he saw: “As C.S. Lewis warned in *Screwtape*, my faith had become a means to a political end, and not an end unto itself. When that happened, Lewis warned, the enemy almost has his man. I needed that to end before I lost my soul.”

Kuo writes about how, while working for Bill Bennett and Sen. John Ashcroft (R-Mo.), he learned about the “use of code language,” mostly Biblical imagery, which allowed politicians to convince religious leaders that they all were soul brothers. He writes, “this *should* have been driving me nuts. It should have offended me far more than anything President Clinton or the Democrats were doing. We were bastardizing God's words for our own political agenda and feeling good about it. The truth is I didn't think anything of it. I wouldn't for years.”

Many people have grown frustrated with politics; Kuo obviously was touched at a deeper level. After a time, he worried that he “had spoken mistruths in hate” about the Clintons. He had used cheap applause lines, but “that had to stop. If I ever could, I knew I ought to apologize for doing it.” This is another observation that few conservatives, and especially few Christian conservatives, would make, let alone act on.

In one of the moments that suggests God must exist—and that gives Kuo's book an unusual authenticity—he tells of attending a dinner before the National

Prayer Breakfast. Kuo describes how a woman surrounded by Secret Service agents approached: "*oh crap it is the Antichrist. It is Hillary Clinton.* I looked around to make sure I hadn't actually voiced those words. *You wanted a chance to apologize to the Clintons for what you said. Oh double s--t!*"

She "worked" the room, as Washingtonians put it, and Kuo found himself shaking her hand. He apologized for having attacked her personally. But then he worried about being found out. Clinton was moved and later spoke of Kuo's action in the context of forgiveness. When told of it, writes Kuo, "My life flashed before my eyes. My career was ruined. Hillary Clinton had just talked about me apologizing to her ... in public? I was ruined. I knew that I had said I didn't want to do politics anymore, but ... Oh no." She didn't mention his name, so his career survived.

Even after perceiving the error of his ways, Kuo found that temptation was never far away. He left Ashcroft's office to found a charity. Former Vice President Dan Quayle offered to help raise funds—if he could invite the local press to cover his efforts. Writes Kuo:

'Yes, absolutely, great,' I said. Yet my heart was sinking. The little internal voice that had convinced me of my need to apologize to the Clintons was screaming for me to tell Dan Quayle no. His heart may have been perfectly pure. His entire goal may have been just to raise money for these groups. God may well have given him that vision. But that wasn't my vision. Still, I wasn't having a ton of luck raising the millions required to fund my dream. I said yes because I knew he could raise a lot more money than I could on my own, and he could give me more financial security in my own life. So I supposed that I was not part of Dan Quayle's presidential aspirations for 2000.

Neither Kuo's charity nor Quayle's political ambitions gained much from the bargain.

Kuo was invited to meet Texas Gov. George W. Bush and was taken by the latter's commitment to meeting social needs. (Kuo's description of the meeting is cheerfully self-deprecating, one of many endearing moments that make the book both enjoyable and credible.) Kuo ended up writing speeches for candidate Bush before Kuo's friend Mike Gerson was brought on board.

After a dot-com interlude, Kuo joined the White House faith-based office. The result is a distressing story of religious identification and political opportunism, a sustained effort by the administration to take advantage of values voters.

It is this account that has so angered those with a stake in the GOP-Christian alliance. Yet Kuo's critics have neither disputed his facts nor rebutted his arguments. His account has a consistently authentic ring.

EXPLAINS KUO, "GEORGE W. BUSH'S RELIGIOUS ORIENTATION WAS THE MOST CAREFULLY CONTROLLED ASPECT OF HIS PUBLIC IMAGE."

Tempting Faith is no tell-all effort at payback. There is no anger, only disappointment. There is no name calling, only gentle chiding. Kuo never shrinks from acknowledging his own responsibility; he never fails to acknowledge the kindness of his colleagues (especially after he was struck by a brain tumor). He consistently voices his respect for the president. Kuo appears to be the genuine article: a committed Christian dedicated to doing good who found that politicians around him were determined—surprise, surprise!—to advance their own interests.

Alas, how could it be any other way? There is much in Kuo's account of his time in the White House that should repel any devout Christian. Three themes dominate Kuo's account.

First, the president is a committed believer, but he also is a politician, ever ready to use his faith for political advantage. Explains Kuo, "George W. Bush's religious orientation was the most carefully controlled aspect of his public

image. For him to win the Republican nomination, religious conservatives would have to be convinced that his religious faith was genuine and evangelical. But to win the general election, Bush needed to be seen as mainstream, and not 'too' religious." Thus there was abundant use of code words and symbols, as well as "a lot of spiritual sharing," writes Kuo. Many evangelicals came to trust Bush personally, becoming one of his most solid voting blocs.

Second, whatever the president's theoretical commitment to his faith-based initiative, the issue competed with many other administration objectives. Despite the talk of new funding for faith-based groups, Bush officials mostly proposed reprogramming existing funds or counting as "new" old initiatives where impediments to access by religious groups supposedly were lowered.

Nor could the president claim ignorance. Before addressing one meeting of pastors, Bush pulled Kuo aside and asked about funding. Kuo told him the truth—that "there was *technically* about \$8 billion in existing programs that were now eligible for faith-based groups. But, I assured him, faith-based groups had been getting money from those programs for years." Nevertheless, Bush announced that the administration had set aside \$8 billion in new funds. It was all symbolism. Observes Kuo:

As we walked I vaguely recalled one of Jesus' parables about only being able to reap what you have sown. We had sown the symbolic seeds of compassion with our constituents. They had accepted them gratefully. We had sown them with the president, too, and he was happy with them.

Nothing changed after Kuo left the White House in late 2003. After hearing more misleading administration rhetoric

ric months later, Kuo says, "I was surprised by the brazen deception and I was crushed by it, too."

Third, the faith-based initiative was routinely and shamelessly used to win votes. Kuo astutely observes, "In many areas—particularly domestic policy—this White House didn't exist to advance a certain philosophical agenda. It existed to advance a positive public perception of the president and itself."

From start to finish the program was political. Kuo and his boss regularly attended the White House "message meeting," which set the president's PR agenda. Yet the White House made little effort to pass its own proposal while the GOP leadership sought to milk the

rocate. To the contrary, he writes, "For most of the rest of the White House staff, evangelical leaders were people to be tolerated, not people who were truly welcomed. No group was more eye-rolling about Christians than the political affairs shop." This claim has been sharply criticized, but it almost certainly is true. Those most committed to politics often are the most cynical. Conservative and especially Republican activists are no different: they want votes, not advice, from the Christian Right.

Kuo was long blind but eventually saw: "I realized I had passed through to the other side. I wasn't just a Christian trying to serve God in politics. Now I was a Christian in politics looking for

and "take every ounce of energy we currently expend on politics and divert it to other things."

Such a step would shock both Left and Right, but this argument is perhaps the least persuasive part of *Tempting Faith*. Alas, a temporary change solves nothing. Instead of absenting themselves from politics for a time, Christians need to rethink what politics is about. Government is not a redemptive institution, and it is not capable of remaking society. Nor is it a proper vehicle for promoting Christian theology. The state has important but limited roles, and there's no uniquely Christian agenda for what government does.

Thus Christians should remain active in politics, but not "Christian" politics. They should join with their neighbors in an attempt to make a better world but not act as if there is a particular Christian legislative agenda—even Kuo's preferred program of delivering more federal bucks to religious groups to help meet social needs.

Christians should devote their religious passions to evangelize, aid the poor, support fragile families, discourage abortion, and more. Politics is not unimportant, and some Christians will find themselves called into government. But the Gospel is a message of the individual's relationship with God and with his neighbors, not of how he should use the state to advance his religious beliefs.

Most books that come out of Washington are dedicated to burnishing the author's image or smashing the author's enemies, or both. *Tempting Politics* is neither. It is a refreshingly honest account of how politics can seduce the best intentioned and the most naïve.

Christian political activists who dismiss Kuo rather than confront his arguments risk following Esau in selling their spiritual birthright for a bowl of porridge. ■

Doug Bandow is the author of several books, including Beyond Good Intentions: A Biblical View of Politics (Crossway) and The Politics of Envy: Statism as Theology (Transaction).

"I REALIZED I HAD **PASSED THROUGH TO THE OTHER SIDE**. I WASN'T JUST A CHRISTIAN TRYING TO **SERVE GOD IN POLITICS**. NOW I WAS A CHRISTIAN IN POLITICS **LOOKING FOR WAYS TO RECRUIT OTHER CHRISTIANS**."

legislative fight for evangelical votes. The Office of Public Liaison even demanded that politically influential evangelicals be invited to the prayer services held at the National Cathedral after 9/11.

Among the most blatant political moves was the plan developed by Kuo and his boss to organize roundtable events in states with endangered Republican senators before the 2002 election. They suggested the plan to Ken Mehlman, then head of the White House Office of Political Affairs (later chairman of the Republican National Committee), who liked it but insisted that the legislators "invite" the faith-based personnel to host a meeting. Kuo spoke on behalf of Sen. Wayne Allard (R-Colo.), even though "he had been absolutely silent on compassion issues until that point in his Senate career." There were more politically inspired events—conferences to help faith-based groups apply for federal grants—before the 2004 election.

Although Kuo faithfully served the politicians, the politicians did not recip-

ways to recruit other Christians into politics so that we would have their votes." What to do with this revelation? "Now I had to ask if I was a corrupting force in other people's faith." It was hard for him not to answer yes. After all, as he admits with reluctance, Christian conservatives in the GOP "were the flip side of the NAACP and the Democratic Party," political captives with little real influence.

Kuo fell for Washington's charms. But he's not alone. Many of us also have followed the siren's song. Notes Kuo, "the White House was also one of the most seductive places imaginable. Not just because of the perks, which are nice, but because of the raw power of the place hidden in a true desire to save the world. It is the ring of power from Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*."

Kuo argues, "it is time to take stock both politically and spiritually. Has our political focus produced the desired results?" It's hard to say yes, even though "we've had almost everything we wanted politically." In response, Kuo advocates a temporary fast—just vote,

Stranger Than Fiction



Last year was a bad one for Mohammad Bijeh, an Iranian chap who killed a couple of innocent people and got caught. Iran, as the neocons tell

us, presents a clear and present danger—to Bijeh, that is. In front of a baying crowd, he was flogged at the stake, stabbed in the back by the brother of one of his victims, and stoned by the chanting mob. Then he was hoisted up on a crane by a noose the mother of another victim placed around his neck. It took more than five minutes for him to choke to death while he was taunted and spat upon. His corpse was left dangling for another 20 minutes.

Switch to the Land of the Free and count your lucky stars—if you like to kill people, that is. Over here you can butcher your ex-wife and a male friend walking beside her, make an unsuccessful getaway, have traces of her blood found on the socks in your bedroom, but thanks to star-stuck cops, incompetent prosecutors, a buffoon for a judge, and a despicable defense lawyer, almost become a TV star and a literary lion.

I am of course referring to O.J. Simpson, who continues to draw his \$400,000 annual pension from the NFL and whose multi-million dollar Florida home is safe from any court judgment. But he should not start counting that \$3.5 million he was offered for his new book, *If I Did It*, which promised to reveal how he might have killed Nicole Brown Simpson and Ron Goldman. The book is being shredded, and his two-part interview scheduled to air on Fox, has been pulled from the sweeps' week line-up.

After a major public outcry and appeals from the victims' families, News Corp Chairman Rupert Murdoch delivered the mea culpa himself. Murdoch

has been accused of many things but never of being dumb. He got a whiff of the popular resentment all the way out in Australia, and although he was in the know from the start, he saw the train wreck coming. Good for the dirty digger, as Rupert is known in Blighty.

O.J. is out, but corporate greed is here to stay. So although my spies tell me that promoting the wrongdoings of criminals is dangerous business, here are a few ideas for Murdoch & Co. to make up for the loss of revenue from this fiasco.

I hear that Paul Wolfowitz is trying his hand at science fiction. In his novel, he describes an imaginary America in

humility, patient diplomacy, and a determination to resolve international disputes by peaceful means. When an antagonist tells the heroine that she believes the death of 500,000 Iraqi children was a price worth paying, our girl slaps her rather hard. It is a beautiful ending that will bring readers to tears.

But wait. There is always John Podhoretz, who can also scribble fiction. Podhoretz, as we all know, rose through the ranks of the U.S. Marines and after serving his country became a judicious political analyst. In his novel, the hero is nothing like the author. He is a fat blowhard, inordinately ambitious, who enjoys a lucrative career in journalism calling for permanent war. This book, I predict, will not be serialized by *The Weekly Standard* because of conflict of interest.

HE DESCRIBES AN IMAGINARY AMERICA IN WHICH AN UNSCRUPULOUS BUNCH OF OPPORTUNISTS PIGGYBACKS THEIR WAY TO POWER VIA A CLUELESS PRESIDENT.

which an unscrupulous bunch of opportunists piggybacks their way to power via a clueless president. Then by whipping up hysteria about nuclear holocausts and by cooking intelligence data, they con the nation into waging war against a small country that poses no threat to the United States, an invasion that exclusively serves the interests of a foreign government for which they had surreptitiously worked over a number of years. America builds up a mountain of debt and becomes hated throughout the world.

Madeleine Albright, too, can write fiction, and in her novel she creates a distinguished, intelligent, self-effacing heroine very much like herself who pursues a public life characterized by

Never mind. There is always Hillary Clinton. In her tale, ghosted by David Frum, the heroine works tirelessly in a small-town law firm committed to helping people who are neither powerful nor glamorous. She eventually marries a wonderful man who runs for president and wins the election in a landslide, his motto being "enough is enough." But during his first term, he drops dead after spending a week outdoors helping the poor during a tsunami. The veep asks her to become his veep, and the author goes on to become the next president of the United States.

You might think it's all a bit farfetched but not after the O.J. Simpson saga. Truth, after all, has always been stranger than fiction. ■