



# The Relevance of Religion: How Faithful People Can Change Politics

*John Danforth*

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**The Relevance of Religion: How Faithful People Can Change Politics** John Danforth  
Former United States senator and ambassador to the United Nations John Danforth offers a fascinating, thoughtful, and deeply personal look at the state of American politics today—and how religion can be a bridge over our bitter partisan divide.

In an era of extreme partisanship, when running for office has become a zero-sum game in which candidates play exclusively to their ideological bases, Americans on both sides of the political aisle hunger for the return of a commitment to the common good. Too often, it seems, religion has been used as a wedge to divide us in these battles. But is it also the key to restoring our civic virtue?

For more than a decade, John Danforth, who is also an ordained Episcopal priest, has written extensively on the negative use of religion as a divisive force in American politics. Now he turns to the positive, constructive impact faithful religious believers have and can have on our public life. *The Relevance of Religion* is the product of that period of reflection.

In the calm and wise voice of the pastor he once aspired to be, Senator Danforth argues that our shared religious values can lead us out of the embittered, entrenched state of politics today. A lifelong Republican, he calls his own party to task for its part in creating a political system in which the loudest opinions and the most polarizing personalities hold sway. And he suggests that such a system is not only unsustainable but unfaithful to our essential nature. We are built to care about other people, and this inherent altruism—which science says we crave because of our neurobiological wiring, and the Bible says is part of our created nature—is a crucial aspect of good government.

Our willingness to serve more than our self-interest is religion's gift to politics, John Danforth asserts. In an era when 75 percent of Americans say they cannot trust their elected leaders, *The Relevance of Religion* is a heartfelt plea for more compassionate government—and a rousing call to arms for those wishing to follow the better angels of our nature.

## **Praise for *The Relevance of Religion***

“Using well-supported arguments deriving from his ministerial as well as legal background, Danforth asserts that traditional religious values of sacrifice, selflessness and a commitment to the greater good can and should have prominent roles in America's politics. . . . Danforth's arguments are staunchly supported and clearly explained. . . . For anyone who is faithful as well as political, he provides much food for thought.”—*St. Louis Post-Dispatch*

“John Danforth does his country another service after many. His book is both a serious critique of politicized religion and a strong defense of religion's indispensable role in our common life. He talks of faith as an antidote to egotism, as a force for reconciliation, and as a source of public virtue. His case is illustrated through autobiography, in an honest, winsome, and sometimes self-critical tone. Danforth speaks for civility, collegiality, and useful compromise—and is compelling because he has demonstrated all those commitments himself over the decades.”—**Michael Gerson, columnist, *The Washington Post***

“In this wise and urgent book, John Danforth stands in the company of our great public theologians—Paul Tillich, Martin Luther King, Jr., and the brothers Niebuhr—as he envisions both religious and political practices that enable our better selves. Political participation, pursued well, cultivates generosity and patience, and is good for the soul. What better remedy for mending our broken politics?”—**Charles Marsh, Commonwealth Professor of Religious Studies, University of Virginia**

*From the Hardcover edition.*

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