



Worlds of Power: Religious Thought and Political Practice in Africa (Contemporary History of World Affairs)

Stephen Ellis, Gerrie ter Haar

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With Christian revivals (including Evangelicals in the White House), Islamic radicalism and the revitalisation of traditional religions it is clear that the world is not heading towards a community of secular states. Nowhere are religious thought and political practice more closely intertwined than in Africa. African migrants in Europe and America who send home money to build churches and mosques, African politicians who consult diviners, guerrilla fighters who believe that amulets can protect them from bullets, and ordinary people who seek ritual healing: all of these are applying religious ideas to everyday problems of existence, at every level of society. Far from falling off the map of the world, Africa is today a leading centre of Christianity and a growing field of Islamic activism, while African traditional religions are gaining converts in the West.

One cannot understand the politics of the present without taking religious thought seriously. Stories about witches, miracles, or people returning from the dead incite political action. In Africa religious belief has a huge impact on politics, from the top of society to the bottom. Religious ideas show what people actually think about the world and how to deal with it. Ellis and Ter Haar maintain that the specific content of religious thought has to be mastered if we are to grasp the political significance of religion in Africa today, but their book also informs our understanding of the relationship between religion and political practice in general.

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