

***Rough Country: How Texas Became America's most powerful Bible-Belt State*, R. Wuthnow**

Princeton: Princeton University Press. 2016. vi + 654 pages.

ISBN 978-0-691-16930-9

Reviewed by: Graham A. Duncan

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2583-1914>

University of Pretoria

Emeritus Professor, Faculty of Theology

graham.duncan@up.ac.za

This book is a *tour de force* by one of the USA's leading sociologists. It provides an in-depth study of the history, sociology and religion of the state of Texas in the USA. It is a sizable volume but reads very easily as it moves through the origins and development of one of the most significant states in America. Texas is well known for its allegiance to some of the more right-wing forms of Christian faith, not least fundamentalism which had its origins in the USA; hence its description as the "Bible-Belt State." Here we note the appearance of some of the most extravagant and bizarre characters in American history.

In the final chapter, Wuthnow offers a theoretical framework which forms the basis of his research. He moves beyond current secularisation theory and rational choice theory to multi-level theory where he analyses strategies of institution building, the dynamics of church-state relations, connections of religion to racial and ethnic politics, and the restructuring of religion. He also relies on the perspective offered by practice theory which indicates how action is guided by previous experiences, by what is familiar and comfortable, and by the circumstances which produce unexpected occurrences and determine the goals to be pursued. From this it becomes clear how resistance to secularism was cultivated through fundamentalist religion

This work traces how race, religion and power encountered one another in the period from the Reconstruction following the American Civil War until the appearance of the Religious Right in our day. Here we have, indeed, "Bible-Belt" country, where there is much available evidence for denominational, institutional and political structures as well as personal and group processes. This microcosm is symbolic of the macrocosmic history of the USA in the context of "us" and "them"; strange in a society where most citizens trace their ancestry to



Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae
<https://upjournals.co.za/index.php/SHE/index>
Volume 44 | Number 2 | 2018 | #4281 | 2 pages

<https://doi.org/10.25159/2412-4265/4281>
ISSN 2412-4265 (Online)
© The Author(s)



Published by the Church History Society of Southern Africa and Unisa Press. This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/>)

immigrants. The legacy of slavery is ubiquitous as are attempts to ameliorate the conditions of the poor from private sources. Two themes emerge strongly in the narrative—the idea of liberty of conscience and the freedom from state interference in religious matters.

This book, though written from a sociological perspective, offers much that will help to understand the ethos of contemporary USA. It is grounded in sound historical perspective and is stimulating reading. It is to be commended for its in-depth analysis and expert synthesis of a wide array of sources which contribute to an excellent, detailed and authoritative survey of the influence of Texas on national trends.