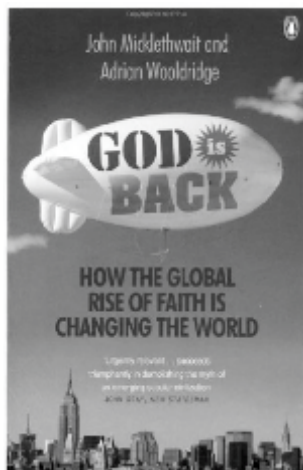


## Book Review



### **God is Back: How The Global Rise of Faith is Changing The World**

**Author:** John Micklethwaite & Adrian Wooldridge

**Publisher:** London: Penguin Books, 2009.

**Number of Pages:** 405

**Price:** £9.99

**ISBN:** 978-0-141-02474-5

**Reviewer:** Joseph Patrick SALIHU

*The most controversial thesis in sociology is arguably the secularization thesis. Simply put, it relates to the diminishing role of religion in the working of the social system. Some interpret this as the end of the road for religion and even placed their prediction within different time frames. Ironically, religion has outlived them all. This has led Peter Berger, a renowned sociologist, to recant the secularization thesis, on which he rode to the height of his career. This caused a great deal of furor in his discipline. Whichever way, the return of religion on the public scene, with the iconic Iranian revolution in 1979, shocked social analysts. Consequently, many books have been written to account for the return of religion to global discourse despite its complete dismissal. Prominent among these are Martin Marty and Scott Appleby's edited 5 volume Chicago project on Fundamentalism, Bruce Lawrence's *Defender of God* and Gilles Kepel's *Revenge of God*, among others.*

*This book equally pays attention to the increasing relevance of religion and argues that the return of religion is due to its ability to reinvent itself, through the adoption of competition and choice, the twin pillars of market capitalism. The book begins by examining the divergent evolution of Europe and America over 200 years, in the light of religion. It then examines the influence of religious pluralism on the intellectual, political and economic spheres of America. It also examines how America is exporting its version of religion as a global commodity. Attention then shifts to how the battle of souls has metamorphosed into a cultural war*

*translating into terrorism and violence. The authors conclude by exploring alternatives that will ensure that future catastrophe based on religion is averted.*

*The genius of the book lies in the fact that its authors did not treat religion as an academic subject and fundamentalists as specimens for experiment. After an extensive theoretical framework, which is surprisingly easy to read, they embarked on a global field trip and allowed their subjects to speak for themselves through reported interviews. Simply put, this is the first academic book, in my reckoning, on religion that takes it seriously. In fact, the authors propose that if religion is part of the problem of modernity, it must be engaged in the process of resolving the problem. They conclusively proposed the American model of religious pluralism that seeks to separate religion from power as the global solution to our contemporary morass. I perceive this solution as part of the American mindset that its models are capable of solving global problems.*

*Religious pluralism works in America because it was part of its national foundation. We have contexts that are far different with regards to religion. Many Middle Eastern countries were founded courtesy of religion and therefore their identities are rooted in the Islamic religion. The separation of religion from the State will become absurd in those contexts. The Nigerian experiment is worth exploring in this regard. Even though the founding fathers adopted the secularity clause in the Constitution, insisting on the separation of Church and State, which the authors proposed, Nigerians continue to truncate this experiment. The involvement of the State in religious affairs has forced many analysts to describe it as a multi-religious State. The American model may work perfectly in America, but it is not a panacea for the global religious upheaval we are experiencing. It will rather exacerbate the situation in some contexts.*

*This quibble does not, however, negate the tone of the entire research. Coming to the subject of fundamentalism, a term they choose to ignore, from a fresh angle and allowing their subjects to speak for themselves is the genius of this book. Their thesis is one that needs to be taken seriously: one cannot understand the modern world, no less our contemporary situation in Nigeria, while ignoring God; irrespective of whether one is a believer or not. God is a significant variable that will simply not disappear according to the wishes of the secularists at the turn of the last century. Religion has always shaped global discourse and will continue to do so.*

*\*This book can be obtained at Nigerian online bookshops like Jumia.*