



# **The Irony of Barack Obama: Barack Obama, Reinhold Niebuhr and the Problem of Christian Statecraft**

*R. Ward Holder, Peter B. Josephson*

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Drawing on the political theology of Reinhold Niebuhr, described by Barack Obama as 'one of my favourite philosophers', this book assesses the challenges facing the President during his first term. It evaluates his success in adhering to Niebuhr's path of 'Christian realism' when faced with the pragmatic demands of domestic and foreign affairs. In 2008 Candidate Obama used the ideas of 'Hope' and 'Change' to inspire voters and secure the presidency. Obama promised change not only regarding America's policies, but even more fundamentally in the nation's political culture. Holder and Josephson describe the foundations of President Obama's Christian faith and the extent to which it has shaped his approach to politics. Their book explores Obama's journey of faith in the context of a broadly Augustinian understanding of faith and politics, examines the tensions between Christian realism and pragmatic progressivism, explains why a Christian realist interpretation is essential to understanding Obama's presidency, and applies this model of understanding to considerations of foreign and domestic policy. By combining this theological and political analysis the book offers a special opportunity to reflect on the relationship between Christian faith and statesmanship, reflections that are missing from current popular discussions of the Obama presidency. Through consideration of Niebuhr's models of the prophet and the statesman, and the more popular alternative of the political evangelist, Holder and Josephson are better able to explain the president's successes and his failures, and to unveil the Augustinian limits of the political life.

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