



After Heaven: Spirituality in America Since the 1950s

Robert Wuthnow

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The evolution of American spirituality over the past fifty years is the subject of Robert Wuthnow's engrossing new book. Wuthnow uses in-depth interviews and a broad range of resource materials to show how Americans, from teenagers to senior citizens, define their spiritual journeys. His findings are a telling reflection of the changes in beliefs and lifestyles that have occurred throughout the United States in recent decades.

Wuthnow reconstructs the social and cultural reasons for an emphasis on a spirituality of *dwelling* (houses of worship, denominations, neighborhoods) during the 1950s. Then in the 1960s a spirituality of *seeking* began to emerge, leading individuals to go beyond established religious institutions. In subsequent chapters Wuthnow examines attempts to reassert spiritual discipline, encounters with the sacred (such as angels and near-death experiences), and the development of the "inner self." His final chapter discusses a spirituality of *practice*, an alternative for people who are uncomfortable within a single religious community and who want more than a spirituality of endless seeking.

The diversity of contemporary American spirituality comes through in the voices of the interviewees. Christians, Jews, Buddhists, Muslims, Hindus, and Native Americans are included, as are followers of occult practices, New Age religions, and other eclectic groups. Wuthnow also notes how politicized spirituality, evangelical movements, and resources such as Twelve-Step programs and mental health therapy influence definitions of religious life today.

Wuthnow's landmark book, *The Restructuring of American Religion* (1988), documented the changes in institutional religion in the United States; now *After Heaven* explains the changes in personal spirituality that have come to shape our religious life. Moreover, it is a compelling and insightful guide to understanding American culture at century's end.

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