



Looking for God in the Suburbs: The Religion of the American Dream and its Critics, 1945-1965

James Hudnut-Beumler

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In the 1950s, 99 percent of adult Americans said they believed in God. How, James Hudnut-Beumler asks, did this consensus about religion turn into the confrontational debates over religion in the 1960s? He argues that post-World War II suburban conformity made church-going so much a part of middle-class values and life that religion and culture became virtually synonymous. Secular critics like David Riesman, William Whyte, C. Wright Mills, and Dwight Macdonald, who blamed American culture for its conformism and lack of class consciousness, and religious critics like Will Herberg, Gibson Winter, and Peter Berger, who argued that religion had lost its true roots by incorporating only the middle class, converged in their attacks on popular religion.

Although most Americans continued to live and worship as before, a significant number of young people followed the critics' call for a faith that led to social action, but they turned away from organized religion and toward the counterculture of the sixties. The critics of the 1950s deserve credit for asking questions about the value of religion as it was being practiced and the responsibilities of the affluent to the poor—and for putting these issues on the social and cultural agenda of the next generation.

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