The Transformation of American Religion

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American religion - like talk of God - is omnipresent. Popular culture is awash in religious messages, from the singing cucumbers and tomatoes of the animated VeggieTales series to the bestselling "Left Behind" books to the multiplex sensation The Passion of the Christ. In The Transformation of American Religion, sociologist Alan Wolfe argues that the popularity of these cartoons, books, and movies is proof that religion has become increasingly mainstream. In fact, Wolfe argues, American culture has come to dominate American religion to such a point that, as Wolfe writes, "We are all mainstream now." The Transformation of American Religion represents the first systematic effort in more than fifty years to bring together a wide body of literature about worship, fellowship, doctrine, tradition, identity, and sin to examine how Americans actually live their faith. Emphasizing personal stories, Wolfe takes readers to religious services across the nation - an Episcopal congregation in Massachusetts, a Catholic Mass in a suburb of Detroit, an Orthodox Jewish temple in Boston - to show that the stereotype of religion as a fire-and-brimstone affair is obsolete. Gone is the language of sin and damnation, and forgotten are the clear delineations between denominations; they have been replaced with a friendly God and a trend towards sampling new creeds and doctrines. Overall, Wolfe reveals American religion as less radical, less contentious, and less dangerous than it is generally perceived to be.

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