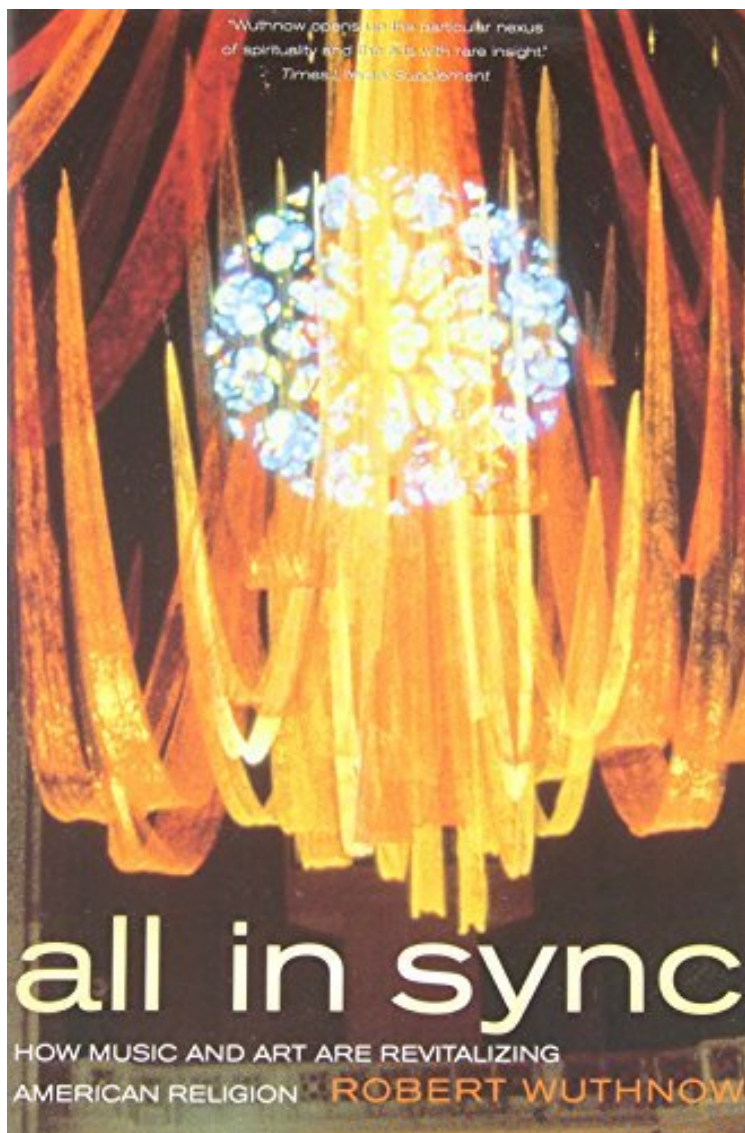


[Download] All in Sync: How Music and Art Are Revitalizing American Religion

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Robert Wuthnow

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Robert Wuthnow : All in Sync: How Music and Art Are Revitalizing American Religion before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised All in Sync: How Music and Art Are Revitalizing American Religion:

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. The Theologian in Everyone By Hawkeye When I first saw the title "All in Sync: How Music and Art Are Revitalizing American Religion," I thought the book might be about the cultural integration of art and religion in America. In fact "all in sync" refers to a comment made by a member of a predominantly African American congregation about the feeling of gospel singing in unison: "When we're all in sync, you can feel the spirit moving." Wuthnow endorses artistic, spiritual, communitarian synchronization--which is

impeded by religion which occurs above the neckline. He doesn't like rational theology, religious dogma, and religious tradition, and he sees music and art as working their magic not so much by revitalizing religion as by replacing it with spirituality--which is about feeling, not thinking. Consider the entry for "God" in the book's index: "God, artistic interest and closeness to; attending church and closer relationship with; feeling close to; music and closeness to; sermons and feeling close to." That's not the entire entry, but the emphasis on feeling is unmistakable. So the revitalization of the churches comes down to the question of their acceptance or rejection of artistically-induced spiritual growth. Here is his most relevant empirical finding: "Members of mainline Protestant and Catholic churches are less likely than people in the nation at large to hold negative views of the arts, but members of evangelical Protestant churches are more likely than people in the nation at large to hold such views. And the differences are substantial: whereas only one mainline Protestant or Catholic in nine is negative toward the arts, about one evangelical Protestant in four is negative." So, the arts are revitalizing open-minded spirituality, but the narrow-minded Evangelical patient is hopeless and must be given Last Rites. In other words, if you are interested in spiritual growth, stay away from Evangelicalism. But do his data support such a conclusion? Wuthnow does not make a convincing case that the Evangelical disdain for contemporary art is based on an inability to appreciate the spiritual potential of art, as such. Good art critics, as well as Fundamentalists, are contemptuous of a good deal of contemporary ("Euro-trash") art. In any case, his own figures indicate that 75% of Evangelicals do NOT have negative views of the arts. Many enjoy Beethoven, Bach, and Mozart. I am not defending Evangelical theology, but I do think a wiser commentator than Wuthnow would recognize that theology, as such, is not the problem. His last chapter is entitled "The Artist in Everyone." By shifting the focus from theology to art, which we are all capable of pursuing, we can achieve "faithful living in a spiritual democracy." Wonderful. But why no chapter on "The Theologian in Everyone"? Sociologist Peter Berger has (independently of his sociology) written an excellent lay theology ("Questions of Faith") which takes the form of a commentary on the Apostles' Creed. He is unhappy with the professional theologians and has become his own. He encourages others to do the same. It makes sense to me. And one of the issues of central importance in my lay theology is the intrinsic relation between art and religion. Can experiential art and reflective theology get in sync? Surveys and interviews (Wuthnow's main research tools) lack the power to dig much below the surface. No doubt that is why they point us spiritual folks to the mainline (liberal) churches, which, Wuthnow fails to point out, have been losing more members to Evangelical churches than vice versa--quite possibly because their liberalism does not satisfy deep needs of any kind.

5 of 5 people found the following review helpful. Arts and graces
 By FrKurt Messick
 This book by Robert Wuthnow, professor of social sciences and Director of the Centre for the Study of Religion at Princeton University, draws upon extensive research, including interviews with more than 400 people involved in a diverse number of worship settings across the country. In this study, Wuthnow documented a strong connection between interest in the arts and interest in spiritual growth. Americans are fundamentally a religious, spiritual people. 'Spirituality is deeply significant to most Americans. Despite the materialism that surrounds us, the quest to know God and to experience the sacred has not diminished,' according to Wuthnow. However, this quest does not always happen within the confines of the institutional church - increasingly, people are looking for other ways of making connections with God. Music and art are part of this quest, but often overlooked, save in the most formal of ways. There is an undercurrent of Protestant/Puritan mistrust of images, many kinds of artwork, and many types of music. One would think in this media-saturated culture that people would not lack for images, sounds, and words to experience, but this is part of the problem, according to Wuthnow. 'Although mass media make it easy for Americans to explore the arts, the results of such explorations are often disappointing. Media-fed spirituality suffers from superficiality, while momentary inspiration fails to illumine the dark night of the soul.' Wuthnow explores the overall religious identity of the United States, looking at statistical studies and trends since the post-World War II period. He shows growth in different ways (more people identifying themselves as conservative and as liberal religiously, more interest in spirituality vs. historic religious institutions, etc.) but also asks questions regarding the basis of these trends. Wuthnow shows that the arts play a great deal of importance in spirituality trends, including music, television, film, theatre, museum and formal 'arts' shows, and publishing. Wuthnow argues in this book 'that the vitality of America's churches may depend significantly on the public's growing interest in artistic activities.' Wuthnow admits that some may find this argument a stretch, but in his subsequent chapters, he does give interesting argument for support. Wuthnow's text deals with issues in art, spirituality, imagination, liturgy and worship, problems of conflict between the arts and the churches, and the awakening of the artistic soul in every person. We live in a consumer society, and this approach is often found with regard to understanding the arts, too. 'Because it is easier to be consumers of art than to create it, it is all the more important to emphasise that art is a strong form of personal discipline.' As Wuthnow states, it is not that Americans are averse to work (indeed, quite the opposite), but that the arts have always been relegated to that arena of life that is a hobby, a value-added-extra not actually required, save for those very few who are professional artists. Wuthnow gives advice to congregational leaders to be sensitive to the various issues in art, particularly the way in which people have become accustomed to different ways of seeing and knowing, and the values of democracy and individuality that the arts tend to support. The arts are important in ways that need to be carefully considered, and Wuthnow's book is a very good way of exploring these issues.

Robert Wuthnow shows how music and art are revitalizing churches and religious life across the nation in this first-ever consideration of the relationship between religion and the arts. *All in Sync* draws on more than four hundred in-depth interviews with church members, clergy, and directors of leading arts organizations and a new national survey to document a strong positive relationship between participation in the arts and interest in spiritual growth. Wuthnow argues that contemporary spirituality is increasingly encouraged by the arts because of its emphasis on transcendent experience and personal reflection. This kind of spirituality, contrary to what many observers have imagined, is compatible with active involvement in churches and serious devotion to Christian practices. The absorbing narrative relates the story of a woman who overcame a severe personal crisis and went on to head a spiritual direction center where participants use the arts to gain clarity about their own spiritual journeys. Readers visit contemporary worship services in Chicago, Philadelphia, and Boston and listen to leaders and participants explain how music and art have contributed to the success of these services. *All in Sync* also illustrates how music and art are integral parts of some Episcopal, African American, and Orthodox worship services, and how people of faith are using their artistic talents to serve others. Besides examining the role of the arts in personal spirituality and in congregational life, Wuthnow discusses how clergy and lay leaders are rethinking the role of the imagination, especially in connection with traditional theological virtues. He also shows how churches and arts organizations sometimes find themselves at odds over controversial moral questions and competing claims about spirituality. Accessible, relevant, and innovative, this book is essential for anyone searching for a better understanding of the dynamic relationships among religion, spirituality, and American culture.