

Godtalk, by Brad Gooch

reviewed by [Wayne A. Holst](#) in the [July 31, 2002](#) issue

Two provocative insights surface in novelist and English professor Brad Gooch's introduction to *Godtalk*. The first is that the spiritual quest in America has become less superficial and "more sophisticated, more global and more interested in tradition." Borders are opening like never before between the world's cultures and religious traditions. A kind of free-trade agreement about rituals and practices is occurring, especially among the young.

The second is that "New Age" is becoming an obsolete term for the plethora of spiritual expressions originating outside mainstream Judeo-Christian religion. Even self-help books are evolving as a genre of popular wisdom literature "caught somewhere between memoir, common sense and sermon." Readers could convincingly argue that the book's subsequent chapters are comely but less than substantive elaborations of these insights based on the author's extensive, eclectic experience.

This book is quite different from the empirical assessment made in Robert C. Fuller's *Spiritual but Not Religious*. In contrast to Fuller's integrated evaluation, Gooch offers five unrelated snapshots of modern spiritual currents whose impact and fallout will be felt within and beyond mainstream religion.

He investigates modern spiritualism (*The Urantia Book*); the pop science, psychology and Hinduism of feel-good entrepreneur Deepak Chopra and other synthesizers of Eastern and Western science and spirituality; Trappist monasticism, especially the communities made famous by Thomas Merton; the homosexual church movement; and the Americanization of Islam.

Gooch could probably have delivered his message in less than half the space taken by the book. Nevertheless, he writes engagingly and with literary panache. America's religious landscape is indeed mutating, as Gooch argues. But American spirituality has always been in a state of transformation, and the more things are in flux, the more they tend to remain the same.