



# Landscapes of the Soul: The Loss of Moral Meaning in American Life

*Douglas V. Porpora*

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Do you believe in God? Nine out of ten Americans unhesitatingly answer yes. But for Douglas Porpora, the real questions begin where pollsters leave off. What, he asks, does religious belief actually mean in our lives? Does it shape our identities and our actions? Or, despite our professions of faith, are we morally adrift?

*Landscapes of the Soul* paints a disturbing picture of American spiritual life. In his search for answers to his questions, Porpora interviewed clerks and executives, Jews, evangelical Christians, Buddhists, Taoists, and even followers of Bhagwan Sri Rajneesh. He asked them about God, and about what they saw as their own place in the universe. What he found was a widespread inability to articulate any grand meaning of life. We lack heroes to inspire us. We lack a sense of calling, of transcendent purpose in our existence. Many of us seem incapable of caring deeply about the suffering of others. Our society is permeated with moral indifference. Yes, we are a believing people, but God is often a distant abstraction and rarely an emotional presence in our lives. Only such an emotional connection, Porpora argues, can be the basis of a genuine moral vision.

Our emotional estrangement from God and the sacred keeps us from caring about social justice, keeps us from wanting to change the world, keeps us enclosed in our own private worlds. *Landscapes of the Soul* is a passionate call to broaden our spiritual and moral horizons, to raise our eyes to the greater reality that unites us all.

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