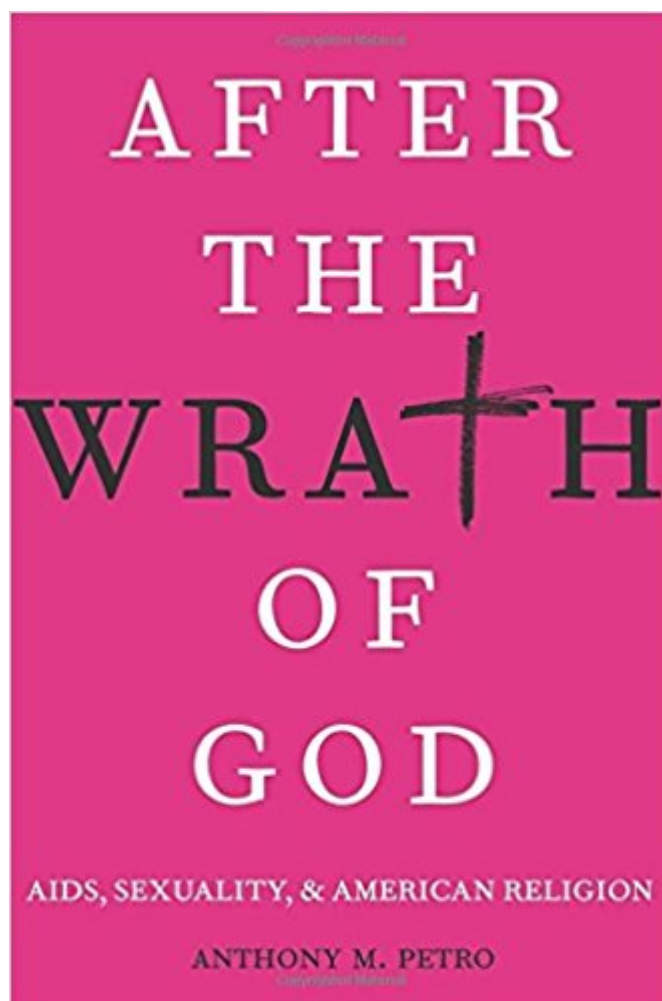


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# After The Wrath Of God: AIDS, Sexuality, And American Religion



## Synopsis

On a cold February morning in 1987, amidst freezing rain and driving winds, a group of protesters stood outside of the Unitarian Universalist Church in Amherst, Massachusetts. The target of their protest was the minister inside, who was handing out condoms to his congregation while delivering a sermon about AIDS, dramatizing the need for the church to confront the seemingly ever-expanding crisis. The minister's words and actions were met with a standing ovation from the overflowing audience, but he could not linger to enjoy their applause. Having received threats in advance of the service, he dashed out of the sanctuary immediately upon finishing his sermon. Such was the climate for religious AIDS activism in the 1980s. In *After the Wrath of God*, Anthony Petro vividly narrates the religious history of AIDS in America. Delving into the culture wars over sex, morality, and the future of the American nation, he demonstrates how religious leaders and AIDS activists have shaped debates over sexual morality and public health from the 1980s to the present day. While most attention to religion and AIDS foregrounds the role of the Religious Right, Petro takes a much broader view, encompassing the range of mainline Protestant, evangelical, and Catholic groups--alongside AIDS activist organizations--that shaped public discussions of AIDS prevention and care in the U.S. Petro analyzes how the AIDS crisis prompted American Christians across denominations and political persuasions to speak publicly about sexuality--especially homosexuality--and to foster a moral discourse on sex that spoke not only to personal concerns but to anxieties about the health of the nation. He reveals how the epidemic increased efforts to advance a moral agenda regarding the health benefits of abstinence and monogamy, a legacy glimpsed as much in the traction gained by abstinence education campaigns as in the more recent cultural purchase of gay marriage. The first book to detail the history of religion and the AIDS epidemic in the U.S., *After the Wrath of God* is essential reading for anyone concerned with the intersection of religion and public health.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"Moralizing of a particular religious stripe seems indelibly attached to some of the most dire public health issues of our time. [...] What *After the Wrath* does is demonstrate how and why this moralizing has wiggled into even our most enlightened and progressive health policies. Behavior judgments-particularly of sexual behavior-continue to shape public policy but Petro provides us with a useful tool for identifying those judgments, and parsing their meaning." --*The Revealer*"*After the Wrath of God* is a subtle, discerning analysis of religious responses to AIDS that goes far beyond the usual attention to the Christian Right. Petro brings ecumenical Protestants, Roman Catholics, biomedical officials, and ACT UP protestors into view alongside their evangelical compatriots and in doing so creates a richly polychromatic picture of American religion, sexuality, and moral debate in the wake of the AIDS epidemic." --Leigh Eric Schmidt, Edward C. Mallinckrodt Distinguished University Professor, Washington University in St. Louis"*The AIDS crisis was not an epoch that we survived. It is a battle that we are still fighting. In this remarkable work of historical intervention Anthony Petro explores the extraordinary religious ferment that accompanied the emergence of AIDS in the United States. Petro shows that when Americans talk about AIDS they are rarely just talking about a scientific problem or a pharmaceutical solution. They are instead offering a sociology of suffering and a plan for spiritual warfare. After the Wrath of God is required reading for anyone interested in the way this powerful religious past will shape our political future.*" --Kathryn Lofton, Professor of Religious Studies, American Studies, History and Divinity; Chair, Women's, Gender and Sexuality Studies, Yale University"*Anthony Petro's novel account of the role of American Christianity in the AIDS crisis moves beyond expected narratives of the rise of the right to encompass a diversity of religious responses across the 'long 1980s.' Illuminating and important.*" --Margot Canaday, Associate Professor of History, Princeton University"*With clear prose that is free of theoretical jargon, this account is a suitable purchase for public and academic libraries...*" --*Library Journal*"*Provides a new perspective on US religious history during a time of considerable shifts in US politics. This will be a valuable book for those interested in history and sexuality studies as well as religious studies. It may also be useful to those in public health and medicine. Highly*

recommended." --Choice "[An] excellent book." --The Guardian "Petro is an heir to the historical perspective of Michel Foucault in showing how social changes that may appear liberatory or progressive often involve the consolidation of more conservative and normative values and constraints. After the Wrath of God will benefit both readers who think they already know this history because they lived it and readers who have always lived under the shadow of HIV/AIDS and never known a world without it." --Elizabeth A. Castelli, e-misfĂ©rica: Performance and Politics in the Americas

Anthony Petro is Assistant Professor of Religion at Boston University.

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