

Icons of American Protestantism: The Art of Warner Sallman ^[1]

Product Type:

[Book](#) ^[2]

Citation:

Morgan, David, ed. *Icons of American Protestantism: The Art of Warner Sallman*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1996.

Abstract:

Icons of American Protestantism examines the history, production, marketing and reception of the art of Warner Sallman (1892-1968) whose paintings and sketches, most notably his enormously-popular *Head of Christ* (1940), serve to illustrate the ways religious art has both shaped and responded to American Protestant piety, identity and culture. Sallman's artistic achievements, spanning the 1940s, 1950s and most of the 1960s, refute the notion that Protestants find little if any meaning in religious imagery. Instead, his work communicates and reflects conservative Protestant beliefs and values—especially the conviction that God is personal, near and intimate—while evoking censure from liberal critics as artistically and religiously inauthentic. At the same time, the commercial production and marketing of Sallman's imagery underscores the fact that his work serves as “part of the American marketplace of culture, where piety has embraced commerce not merely to survive but to flourish.” An Introduction plus six chapters comprise the book's content. Morgan's Introduction looks at the history of religious art in Protestant faith and at production and reception as a cultural system. In Chapter 1, Morgan analyzes the production and reception of Sallman's work in terms of Protestantism's “visual culture.” Erika Doss writes Chapter 2 to suggest Sallman's experience in advertising made him attentive to the public's demand for a “virile, manly” depiction of Christ. Colleen McDannell's Chapter 3 frames the marketing of Sallman's work by the Gospel Trumpet Company (Warner Press) within America's religious material culture and industry. In Chapter 4, Betty Deberg considers the conservative Protestant response to Sallman's art, judging reaction to be receptive yet ambivalent. Sally Promey devotes Chapter 5 to the rejection by America's liberal Protestant establishment and others of Sallman's work as artistically inauthentic, overly sentimental, and culturally insensitive. The book's final chapter, authored by Morgan, draws from hundreds of letters and articles to interpret the ways people understand Sallman's depictions of Christ to be both like and unlike the biblical Jesus.

Authors:

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Host Organization :

Anderson University

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