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God: Stories



Synopsis

In a fresh approach to an age-old discussion, an esteemed editor of the *Atlantic Monthly* collects twenty-five dazzling short stories by eminent writers about spiritual experiences of all sorts. With works by John Updike, Philip Roth, Louise Erdrich, James Joyce, Flannery O'Connor, James Baldwin, Alice Munro, and more, *God: Stories* offers insight, solace, and pleasure not only to the faithful but to seekers -- and to those who simply love fine stories. "Challenging the mind and exhilarating the soul . . . [this] rare and precious collection" (Susannah Heschel) explores the human dimensions of spirituality from the comic to the passionate, the skeptical to the mystical and beyond.

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Customer Reviews

The blunt minimalism of C. Michael Curtis's title is more or less correct. That is, the 30 stories he has assembled in *God* are all explorations of religious faith. But given the cast of contributors--which includes James Baldwin, Bernard Malamud, Louise Erdrich, Alice Munro, and Eudora Welty--no reader should expect a celebration of spiritual orthodoxy. Indeed, these stories seldom take faith as a given. Half the time their authors seem to echo St. Augustine's famous plea: "Help me in my unbelief." And even the believers sometimes settle for the consolation prize of empty (if comforting) ritual. The oldest story in the collection, James Joyce's "Grace," manages single-handedly to embody most of these contradictions. And why not? Here's an author, after all, who noisily severed all his ties to the Catholic Church--only to find its distinctive, Jesuitical fingerprints on almost every word he wrote. "Grace," then, is mainly a satirical take on the sheer unlikeliness of grace itself. Yet

the last scene, in which the hard-drinking vulgarian Mr. Kernan has finally been lured to a church retreat, has more than a grain of awe mixed in among the ridicule. "There's a nice Catholic for you!" declares the reprobate's wife--and defies you to figure out precisely who the joke is on. Joyce's heirs, in this sense, are fellow-contributors J.F. Powers and Tobias Wolff. The former--one of the most criminally undersung figures in American letters--is represented by the gently comical "Zeal." (Note that he and Joyce could have swapped titles without batting an eyelid.) But there are some true believers in the house, too. The southern gothic hilarity of Flannery O'Connor's "Parker's Back" should deceive nobody: this is a deadly serious excursion into the intricacies of faith, complete with a restaging of St. Paul's conversion (a balky tractor fills in for the horse). And even so worldly an author as John Updike takes his religion straight, with hardly a dash of secular bitters. In "Made in Heaven," in fact, our raciest theological mind comes up with the following delicate formulation, prompted by a glance at the night sky: How little, little to the point of nothingness, he was under those stars!... And yet, it was he who was witnessing the stars. They knew nothing of themselves, so in this dimension he was greater than they. As far as he could reason, religion begins with this strangeness, this standstill; faith tips the balance in favor of the pinpoint. Faith is seldom so literally heaven-sent. But in this fine anthology, it makes for many fine and several miraculous works of fiction. --James Marcus --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

A senior editor at the Atlantic Monthly and a seasoned anthologizer of fiction, Curtis has chosen 25 stories that directly and indirectly tackle the complex nature of faith and unbelief. Eminent authors? John Updike, Tobias Wolff, Philip Roth, Eudora Welty, Bobbie Ann Mason, James Joyce and Louise Erdrich among them? respond in manifold ways to the range of meanings captured by the word "God." The stories are alternately disturbing, humorous, mystical and pragmatic. Some of the characters, raised in religious conformity, buck against institutional hypocrisy (as in Joe Ashby Porter's "Roof Work"); others, like Brad in Updike's "Made in Heaven," "assumed that religion was already as dead as Marx and Mencken had claimed" but are attracted to believers. Cynthia Ozick's eponymous Rosa experiences both the shame of victimhood and the grace of redemptive kindness. The clergymen who inevitably populate this collection show themselves to be by turns unorthodox, humble, supercilious, corruptible. The unsettling residue left by these stories' many paradoxes invites the reader to intellectual, moral and metaphysical inquiry. Copyright 1998 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Curtis has two anthologies, one more recent than the other, intended to answer the objections that

the first was too centered on the Judeo-Christian tradition(s). I can't recall as I write my review which was which (the other is called "Faith: Stories")--but together they make a good pair for anyone who wants to read and think about the relationship between the human and the divine. I also recommend supplementing them with a third anthology, A Celestial Omnibus: Short Fiction on Faith, which is more diverse still.

Book in excellent condition. Thank you.

I have read this book as well as another book edited by Mr. Curtis. And I have recommended this book to others and used in a weekly book study at our church a couple of years ago. To me it proves that God provides truth in whatever context it is presented. Some Christians may write-off secular authors or musicians but I feel that all truth is God's truth. If we listen carefully we can learn from the words of a variety of people seeking spiritual truth.

This is a collection of stories from well known authors. The editor of this collection is providing the reader the opportunity to determine how each author may be using the characters' to present scenarios of goodness/evil.

I did not connections to God in many of these stories, nor did a few of them make any sense. I did not really care for this collection.

Good stories, got any more like them?

We are using the book in a Bib-Lit Reading Group. We have used several collections - and the short stories in this book are outstanding and thought provoking. Thank you.

The stories I have read in this book so far are very different than I thought they would be. I must say they are very intriguing and I enjoy the short story versions.

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