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The Savage Side: Reclaiming Violent Models of God

Jill B. Carroll

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In this book, B. Jill Carroll uses the nature writing of Annie Dillard and the philosophical categories of Emmanual Levinas to critique the models of God that drive contemporary political theologies, especially feminist and liberation theologies. These political theologies ignore the amoral and often harsh aspects of our existence in the natural world, even though they often align God with the cosmos. Political theologies excise from their models of God all notions of violence, indifference to social justice or general amorality in favor of models that support and advance specific social, political and economic ideologies. Such 'domestication' of God does not do justice to the hard facts of our existence in the natural world, nor does it fully plumb the depths of using nature to metaphorize God. Furthermore, Carroll argues that current political models of God do not survive the most important critiques of religion in the modern era, namely those leveled by Feuerbach, Freud and Nietzsche. Instead, the 'God of the oppressed' stands tall among any number of gods that exist primarily as projections of our best selves, illusions rooted in wish fulfillment, and attempts to further our own personal goals by claiming the universe is on our side. The Savage Side offers us a glimpse of a natural theology uninterested in apologetics, but thoroughly obsessed with using the natural world as a springboard for describing God. The God that emerges is wildly beautiful, terrifyingly indifferent to political or moral ideology, the consummate Other, and the ultimate ground of our being. This book demands to be read by anyone interested in the relationship between religion and politics, especially those who have given themselves to the cause of social justice in the name of God. Readers will be challenged to let go of comfortable, but outdated notions of deity despite their convenience for the advancement of certain social and political

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