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For the Love of God: The Bible as an Open Book

Alicia Suskin Ostriker

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Quoting King Solomon's famous prayer to God at the Temple in Jerusalem, "Behold, the heaven of heavens cannot contain thee; how much less this house that I have builded," Alicia Suskin Ostriker posits a God who cannot be contained by dogma and doctrine. Troubled by the way the Bible has become identified in our culture with a monolithic authoritarianism, Ostriker focuses instead on the extraordinary variability of Biblical writing.

For the Love of God is a provocative and inspiring re-interpretation of six essential Biblical texts: The Song of Songs, the Book of Ruth, Psalms, Ecclesiastes, Jonah, and Job. In prose that is personal and probing, analytically acute and compellingly readable, Ostriker sees these writings as "counter-texts," deviating from convention yet deepening and enriching the Bible, our images of God, and our own potential spiritual lives. Attempting to understand "some of the wildest, strangest, most splendid writing in Western tradition," she shows how the Bible embraces sexuality and skepticism, boundary crossing and challenges to authority, how it illuminates the human psyche and mirrors our own violent times, and how it asks us to make difficult choices in the quest for justice.

For better or worse, our society is wedded to the Bible. But according to Talmud, "There is always another interpretation." Ostriker demonstrates that the Bible, unlike its reputation, offers a plenitude of surprises.

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