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Divine Betrayal: An Inspirational Story of Love, Rebellion & Redemption

Graceann K. Deters
Grand Sierra Publishing (April 2009)
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In the late 1930s the Kolenda family answered a call heard only by patriarch John Peter. This call brought the whole family to Brazil in order to bring Christianity to the poverty-stricken country. Those years in Brazil began a religious and secular conversion of Grace the Kolendas' youngest daughter. The memoir chronicles her change in belief but also her growing independence from her family and the religious movement that brought them so far from home.

Graceann K. Deters a former teacher and nurse tells her story with great attention to scene setting and detail. She knows how to create atmosphere and characterization. Of her role as pall bearer to babies in the village Deters writes:

The babies lay still in their open caskets their smooth skin oddly dry in the damp heat. White calla lilies lined the boxes of fresh-hewn pine that dug into the flesh of my fingers. Lilies grazed babies' cheeks while the floral scent rose thick as bread dough.

She carefully crafts her family—her father a charismatic zealot; her mother a bitter housewife trying to do her best for her husband and her god even if it is sometimes at the expense of her daughters; and Dorothy her angry older sister who feels like an outcast in the family and takes her fury out on Grace. More characters swirl in and out of the story but at the center is the family's struggle to maintain their beliefs and their customs in the midst of a very foreign land.

For Grace the transition is difficult. She sees a decapitated body still staggering through the streets and friends living in desperate poverty; her daily duties include beheading bleeding and plucking the chickens. In addition she must answer the religious duties set forth by her parents and negotiate the difficult task of being a fun-loving friendly child and a role model to the other children in the village.

Often the details in scenes reveal Grace's growing faith in people and the beauty of her surroundings; sometimes they reveal moments that are difficult to contextualize in terms of the book's larger project. Though the intent is to see a change in faith and allegiance Deters sometimes gets bogged down in revealing everything that happened rather than selecting scenes which best tell her story. Similarly stories that necessitate further explanation like the molesting preacher are neither clarified nor continued. The event may have been singular for the writer but it still requires further reflection as it dethrones the religion that the protagonist eventually leaves.

Further reflection on the nature of her changing faith would have strengthened the narrative. Those beliefs are so key to understanding everyone in the family that they might have been more extensively articulated in the life of Deters herself.

Overall this book is well worth reading. It is well-written interesting and vital to understanding a moment in religious and world history.
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