

God's Ex-Girlfriend: A Memoir about Loving and Leaving the Evangelical Jesus

Gloria Beth Amodeo

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In her memoir *God's Ex-Girlfriend*, Gloria Beth Amodeo is candid about how she was drawn into evangelical Christianity—and about how she came to see it as a “common American cult” involving unhealthy relationship dynamics and repressed sexuality.

Amodeo, who grew up Catholic, had early encounters with evangelicalism and absorbed the message that God sentences people who do not believe in Jesus to hell. When she joined the Campus Crusade for Christ, she found that same exclusivity and inflexibility—veiled by the tactics of free pizza, movie nights, and frank conversations. Eager to impress a new friend, she hid traits that she suspected were unacceptable, like liberal politics, a love of acting, and bisexuality; she was made to feel guilty whenever she acted on her lust.

Having since worked in advertising, Amodeo now recognizes evangelical strategies as manipulative. Her book cites scriptures and doctrines only to undermine them; it exposes proselytization tactics in tongue-in-cheek fashion through recommended steps for reaching the unsaved: “Act normal! ... Target people with the same interests as you. ... Leverage the traumatic pasts of your convertees.” Each step is accompanied by an example from her own years of dedicated evangelizing, in which people mimed compassion while decrying “satanic” activities and encouraging homogeneity.

Family members' struggles widened Amodeo's frame. Her mother's pill addiction, paranoia, and suicide attempt are considered against evangelical approaches to mental illness; her younger sister's cystic fibrosis diagnosis is considered against church decisions to ignore such wrenching situations—or to spiritualize them as demonic warfare.

Hindsight heightens the contrast between Amodeo's early naïveté and her new self-awareness. Looking back, she sees gimmicks and ulterior motives everywhere; she presents leaving the faith as, by turns, snapping out of a fantasy and escaping an exploitative situation. *God's Ex-Girlfriend* is a sardonic memoir about lost faith.

REBECCA FOSTER (March / April 2023)

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