

## Holy Woman: A Divine Adventure

**Louise Omer**

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Louise Omer's *Holy Woman* is an earnest memoir based around informal pilgrimages to meet women faith leaders in search of a spirituality free of men's domination.

Drawn by a charismatic pastor and rock concert-like revivals, Omer joined an evangelical church as a teenager. In time she became indispensable to it, working as its finance administrator and preaching bimonthly. However, she remained troubled by Christianity's patriarchal framework. And in marriage, too, she was asked to exhibit deference to a man's will. She set off from Australia to experience vibrant women's spirituality, from Mexico on the feast day of La Virgen de Guadalupe to a mixed-gender mosque in Berlin.

The book is effective in alternating its before and after sections, contrasting the emotional atmosphere of church gatherings with the disorienting freedom of travel. And the book casts a wide net: in Sweden, Omer meets a lesbian priest and discusses the use of gender-neutral pronouns for God. In Bulgaria, she researches the cult of the goddess of wisdom and attends an International Women's Day march. In the Czech Republic, she explores Jewish rituals surrounding menstruation. The concept of changing religious systems from within rather than shunning them appeals to her.

Women's bodies are central here. "My search for truth was corporeal," Omer insists. In Dublin, she rejoices when the abortion ban is repealed. Her own body presents a quandary, though: purity standards forced her to deny her sexuality pre-marriage; her husband's gaslighting and intimate rejection also provoked frustration. When, in Morocco, she finds herself engaging in submissive behaviors, she wonders what this says about her self-worth.

Pairing an insider's perspective on religion with a seeker's curiosity, *Holy Woman* is both a personal story and a feminist theology taster.

REBECCA FOSTER (November / December 2022)

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