

The God Beat: What Journalism Says about Faith and Why It Matters

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The God Beat collects twenty-six unexpected, thought-provoking stories of belief.

In the text, profiles of charismatic figures stand out, as of a hugging guru who tours Northern California in “Amma’s Cosmic Squeeze,” and of abolitionist Benjamin Lay, a radical Quaker born in 1682. In the lovely, scene-driven “La Llorona Visits the American Academy of Religion,” an inspiring professor is memorialized with a homemade ghost figure wheeled on a banquet cart through an academic conference.

Other pieces focus on events or movements. Kaya Oakes’s “Forgiveness in the Epoch of Me Too” is a personal reflection that weighs Catholic forgiveness against accountability. Two pieces cover the 2018 Tree of Life synagogue shooting: In “Will Anyone Remember Eleven Dead Jews?”, Emma Green follows a man who’s working to archive community reactions to the mass murder, collecting ephemeral objects from that place in time. Then, Shira Telushkin’s stunning “Their Bloods Cry Out from the Ground” follows a Jewish burial society as they clean the crime scene so that victims may be buried with their blood. Like reporters, the burial society does the difficult job of witnessing tragedy. Telushkin’s descriptions of the scene of the crime, and quotes from those who were there, are terrible and memorable.

Throughout, a variety of emotions are conveyed; curiosity is surprised and sated, and hearts are made light and are broken in turn. One selection relates the narrative limits of a mail order DNA test; another translates the Bible and finds surprises in the actual terms. In another, a meal of fake meat is used to explore the role of meat and blood in believers’ diets.

The essays collected in *The God Beat* are an invigorating mix, revealing the varied and fascinating ways that people worship.

MEREDITH GRAHL COUNTS (July / August 2021)

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