



And Your Daughters Shall Prophesy: Stories from the Byways of American Women and Religion

Adrian Shirk

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And Your Daughters Shall Prophesy is a powerful, personal exploration of American women and their religions, weaving connections between Adrian Shirk's own varied spiritual experiences and the prophetesses, feminists, and spiritual icons who have shaped this country.

Laced throughout this hybrid memoir are stories of American religious traditions shaped by women. Shirk collects the histories of astrologers, faith healers, preachers, priestesses, mambos, and mediums who've had to find their own ways toward divinity outside prescribed patriarchal orders. Each woman represents a pathway for Shirk's own spiritual inquiries. She introduces us to the New Orleans high priestess Marie Laveau, the pop New Age pioneer Linda Goodman, the prophetic vision of intersectionality as preached by Sojourner Truth, "saint" Flannery O'Connor, and so many more.

Through her journey, Shirk discovers that, as the culture wars flatten religious discourse and shred institutional trust, more and more Americans are yearning for alternative, individualized, feminist routes through religion. And women, having spent so much time at the margins of religious discourse, illuminate its darkened corners.

And Your Daughters Shall Prophesy is a beacon to those who are searching for a spirituality of resistance, for an unsteady truth. It draws a line from our own era of unrest to the women who came before us, those fascinating innovators, boundary crossers, paradoxes, and radical justice seekers.

And Your Daughters Shall Prophesy: Stories from the Byways of American Women and Religion Details

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Madison Davis says

How do we draw on historical lineages to contextualize our own narratives? What have important women taught (and continue to teach) us about the intersections between culture, faith, performance, family, followers, bad & good? What stories are worth telling and who gets to decide? In this book, Adrian touches on all of these questions and more as she delves into the stories of American women and spirituality. From the prolific astrologer Linda Goodman, to the infamous Vodun queen, Madam Marie Laveau to literary giant Flannery O'Conner she seamlessly moves between historical content and her personal past and present. With wit and great sincerity, her writing offers insights on the struggles of familial pain, mental illness and forging spiritual understanding of the world outside of its harmful patriarchal context. In this book, Adrian the monumental women are given room that may have eluded them through the course of their lives--that is she writes about them as more than fixtures in time but as people, complex and human.

Michaela says

---- Disclosure: I received this book for free from Goodreads. ----

What a tedious read. The writing style is dull enough, but the book is made worse in that it sets you up for disappointment, b/c the material inside is not as represented by either the title, blurbs, or back cover description. Initially this causes confusion, until one realizes the misrepresentation of the material as the source of said confusion.

Primarily though, the problem with this book is that there is really nothing here. This is a lot of grasping at straws by someone who at best seems to be desperately searching for something in the longer-lens of history on which to hang their self-identity. I mean there is a whole chapter about smoking cigarettes. Give me a break. An obviously pedestrian form of young rebellion colored up as something more. One can have the same experiences of community w/ fellows in heroin addiction, alcoholism, or less destructively, just gatherings of people passionate about music, art, or anything else at all. Just go where you passion is, and there you will find your people. Pretty simple concept.

There is a lot of history attached to the female experience and religion. There is quite enough that one does not have to go casting about at air in order to find substantial content worthy of exploration. If that kind of information is what one is interested in, this is not the book in which to find it. If you want to listen to someone blather on, trying to spin webs of nothing into something so as to give some appearance of depth to their life, even though the entire time they are really just talking about themselves (again, in order to give the appearance of weight that does not in fact exist), well then this is the book for you. Or you could just go listen to any over-privileged female who has lived a life of minimal risk go on and on about what great new things they pretend to have uncovered in a life actually devoid of any truly challenging experiences. Basically, this thing comes off as just more bougie bologna. I regret the time I lost to reading it. I won't even pass it on, I'm just going to recycle it & try to move past the irritated sensation that set in from having read it.

Jenny (Reading Envy) says

I didn't realize, at first, that this book would combine memoir with the stories of female religious leaders. For me, despite my love of the braided essay and so on, I am not sure the combination always works. It's true that the author writes about the female characters she has encountered at various points of her life, but her own story has more to do with dealing with mental illness in her family. It doesn't have as many connections to the religion stories as I would have liked.

That said, I enjoyed the religious sections very much. There are a few people in here you would expect to see - Aimee Semple McPherson, Sojourner Truth, etc., but several more I had never heard of and really enjoyed reading about. She extends outside the standard religions to include new-age practices, spiritualism, and mass market paperback astrologers. I really liked the inclusion of Eliza R. Snow and how her work for women in the early Mormon church, and how that connects to contemporary movements doing the same.

Adrian Shirk is very respectful of these characters, acknowledging their imperfections but letting those get in the way of recognizing their influence. So often a misstep or a rumor (or even a true story, ha) has served to dismiss these women's contributions, and I liked her approach.

This would fit nicely on a shelf next to books on feminist theology, and I have quite a few that would hold it in good company.

I received a copy of this early from the publisher through Edelweiss, although by the time I finished it the book came out, on August 22.

Lisa says

Lovely writing but way more self observed than I wanted. I was hoping for actual stories of American women who were religious figures and I mostly got a memoir of someone who isn't 30 yet and wants to tell her story. That's fine, but just not what I was at all wanting to know about. So many things of universal significance aren't sorted out by the time you're 30 and it just wasn't interesting going through that meandering navel gazing. I felt she thought her story had more significance in its relationship to great American religious figures than it did.

The writing was enjoyable though and I would look out for other non-autobiographical things written by her.

Jan says

Just received this book today, as a Goodreads win, thank you. Looks like it will be a real interesting read.

Finished, I found this book to be funny, witty and also cynical. The author takes us through a journey of her dysfunctional family and their gypsy like life style, and along the way we learn many interesting facts of Adrian Shirks life and family.

While reading these pages, the reader may even learn something. For instance, although I love getting the magazine Christian Science I had never ever delved into who started it, or why. So I had to research stuff along the way. By the time I finished this book, (which I had marked all over of items to check, read up on and discover), I was a little more knowledgeable about the American Women's fight for equality.

Although Ms. Shirk and I come from two different worlds, some paths we have traveled together along the way to enlightenment. For instance, my book shelf holds many interesting books on religion, a guest to my home will find a wide variety of reads on many different subjects, including religion. One book case holds, side by side, The Catholic Bible, New World Bible, Books of Common Prayer, next to two books of Mormon and the Koran, next to Proofs of Baha'ullah, next to Jehovah Witness, next to The Book of the Dead, next to the Tarot cards, next to...well I could go on and on. So yes, I did find the book interesting, especially the spiritual essay, me being the first daughter of the first daughter for centuries, and having parents with "the gift".

So well done Ms. Shirk, I enjoyed your life story and your journeys, and the insight into an American families life, very different from my own. I will pass on, and hope others find it as interesting as I.

Emily says

A blend of memoir and biographies of the female prophets of America. At times, incredibly interesting with sentences that felt like they jumped right out of my brain. But I think it could have benefited from some more structure/cohesion/clarity. Reminds me of Alex Mar's "Witches of America", who she actually references at the end of the book as a woman with similar needs and questions about religion. Fantastic references and cover.

Olivia says

One of my favorite moments from this book occurs in the essay about Eliza Snow when Shirk's stepmother remarks, after a visit to the Salt Lake City LDS temple, "I just have no patience. I believe in animals, that's my religion. You know?" and in response Shirk writes, "I mean, I do know, in a way, and I don't—because it actually seems really important to me that one should try to understand why people believe the shit they do, and I feel like my position on this should be obvious to Tessa by now."

The essays in AYDSP are all governed by a similar kind of candid yet rigorous inquiry and Shirk's prose is confident and balanced. In the early essays I was more interested in the subjects of Shirk's research—Mary Baker Eddy, Flannery O'Conner, Linda Goodman—and then all of a sudden the personal narrative in "Blackout," was causing me to cry while reading in a food court. I found "Blackout" to be the highlight of the book and "Witchery" a close second. Honestly though, they're all great and Shirk handles the wide range of material (historical, religious, personal, familial) with a really adroit hand and no theatrics, affording all the respect they deserve.

Anyway, I loved this book. Definitely best to read these essays in the order they appear, probably best to limit yourself to one or two per day so that your curiosity builds as the scope of the book widens and each chapter can be appreciated in and of itself.

Lauren says

I learned a lot about notable women in America's religious history. Not ideal if you're doing research for a paper on one of those women, but definitely interesting as a memoir you can learn from.

Laura says

I loved this book! Such a meaningful, important exploration of belief, salvation, family, power, hope, and belonging in the United States. I was particularly fascinated by the chapters on The Fox Sisters, Eliza Snow, and Marie Laveau, and learned a great deal about these complex and too-overlooked spiritual leaders. I also really valued Shirk's inclusion of details and narratives from her own life, which felt so important in a book that does such great work to challenge the boundary between the public and private, the "domestic" and the revolutionary. Perhaps most importantly, I was so impressed and moved by Shirk's generosity and integrity approaching all of her subjects. The respect she shows these women is a lesson in itself. Through her intelligent, sparkling prose Shirk moves deftly between these crucial but often neglected histories and her own personal experiences, and invites her readers to join her in considering those questions about life and death and God that have moved so many to such highs and lows for so long. It was a pleasure to read and fascinating in the best ways, I recommend it so highly!!

Robert Balkovich says

And Your Daughters Shall Prophesy is one of my favorite non-fiction books I've read this year. I was blown away at how effortlessly Shirk blends the personal with the historic. It is both an endlessly fascinating look through time at the lives and legacies of female religious leaders, as well as an engaging story of one woman's journey through the many faiths she's crossed paths with. I would highly recommend this book to anyone who loves non-conventional non-fiction narratives. Also: the prose is superb throughout!

W. says

It's rare to read a work that blends memoir and narrative nonfiction so seamlessly as Adrian Shirk's "And Your Daughters Shall Prophesy." What I believe makes this book work is that Shirk explores the lives of women and their relationship with religion by not rounding up the usual suspects. Plus, her work moves fluidly from the lives of Aimee Semple McPherson and Marie Leveau to her relationship with the varieties of religious experience in contemporary culture. In a world filled with people who are "spiritual but not religious," Shirk shows how Americans are looking for new varieties of religious experience and finding them in usual places and stories.

Ashur says

I was expecting it to be less of a memoir, but luckily Shirk is interesting enough that I didn't mind. Vaguely want to ask if she'd be willing to read tarot for me, but I think I'll just wait until her next publication comes out instead.

Additionally, this book has given me a new list of road-tripping destinations.

Hilary Barnett says

The book was engaging enough, and I learned some interesting fact about the subjects. It's always encouraging to read about the "cloud of witnesses" of female leaders, and how they came to their calling and ministry. Unfortunately the memoir sections were a bit incongruous and self indulgent. I would have enjoyed it much more had it stuck to the biographical purpose more closely.

Blair says

Want to dive into the multi-layered, highly varied world of American women and religion? This hybrid memoir was a fascinating examination of famous women leaders in spiritual movements across the centuries, including portraits of the sisters who founded Spiritualism, Sojourner Truth, and Mary Baker Eddy, founder of the Christian Scientist movement. Braided with personal stories of Shirk's struggle for spiritual fulfillment, this felt so deeply connected to the novels I write — it was a personal and moving look at forgotten feminist voices in religion.

Amelia says

Drawn to the genre of memoir/non-fiction/essay lately. This was a curious combination of the three. I didn't always feel the pieces connect.
