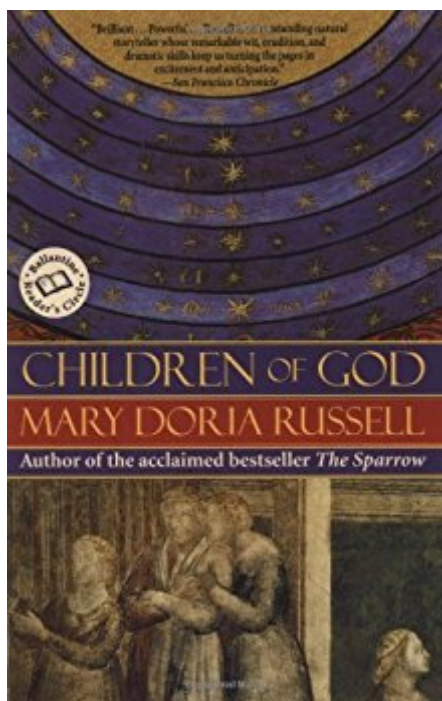


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Children Of God (The Sparrow Series)



Synopsis

Mary Doria Russell's debut novel, *The Sparrow*, took us on a journey to a distant planet and into the center of the human soul. A critically acclaimed bestseller, *The Sparrow* was chosen as one of *Entertainment Weekly's* Ten Best Books of the Year, a finalist for the Book-of-the-Month Club's First Fiction Prize and the winner of the James M. Tiptree Memorial Award. Now, in *Children of God*, Russell further establishes herself as one of the most innovative, entertaining and philosophically provocative novelists writing today. The only member of the original mission to the planet Rakhat to return to Earth, Father Emilio Sandoz has barely begun to recover from his ordeal when the Society of Jesus calls upon him for help in preparing for another mission to Alpha Centauri. Despite his objections and fear, he cannot escape his past or the future. Old friends, new discoveries and difficult questions await Emilio as he struggles for inner peace and understanding in a moral universe whose boundaries now extend beyond the solar system and whose future lies with children born in a faraway place. Strikingly original, richly plotted, replete with memorable characters and filled with humanity and humor, *Children of God* is an unforgettable and uplifting novel that is a potent successor to *The Sparrow* and a startlingly imaginative adventure for newcomers to Mary Doria Russell's special literary magic. From the Hardcover edition.

Book Information

File Size: 4214 KB

Print Length: 466 pages

Publisher: Ballantine Books (December 18, 2007)

Publication Date: December 18, 2007

Sold by: Random House LLC

Language: English

ASIN: B0012D1D9Q

Text-to-Speech: Not enabled

X-Ray: Not Enabled

Word Wise: Enabled

Lending: Not Enabled

Enhanced Typesetting: Enabled

Best Sellers Rank: #20,359 Paid in Kindle Store (See Top 100 Paid in Kindle Store) #9 in Books > Literature & Fiction > Genre Fiction > Religious & Inspirational > Science Fiction & Fantasy #19 in Books > Christian Books & Bibles > Literature & Fiction > Science Fiction #41 in Books >

Customer Reviews

Mary Doria Russell's *The Sparrow* was one of the best SF books of 1996 and a remarkable first novel. That novel, which involved first contact with aliens living on the planet Rakhat (orbiting Alpha Centauri) worked well on a number of levels. It told a good story, had interesting characters, creating a fascinating alien civilization, and explored some interesting philosophical issues. The ending of the book left me stunned and nearly in tears. I was thus rather worried when I heard that Russell was at work on a sequel. I wasn't convinced that the book needed a sequel and wasn't sure that any sequel could live up to *The Sparrow*. *Children of God* isn't quite as good as *The Sparrow*. However, although it doesn't have quite the impact of the original, it is still a fine novel in its own right. The book interweaves two stories: the story of Emilio Sandoz and his return to Rakhat and the story of what happened on Rakhat after the original Jesuit mission failed and Sandoz was sent back to earth. The two stories together continue and in many ways complete much of the story of *The Sparrow*, in a way that makes the book feel like a natural, almost essential sequel. On Rakhat, war has broken out. The Runa, the herbivore species that were both the servants and the food of the planet's other intelligent species, the Jana'ata, have risen up against their former masters. At the same time, Jana'ata society itself is undergoing great changes, in fact is undergoing a mostly progressive social revolution, lead by the same Jana'ata who was the source of Emilio's brutalization in *The Sparrow*. Russell does a very good job here of not giving us good guys and bad guys in this struggle.

As intriguing as the first novel, *The Sparrow*, *Children of God* kept me reading, but reluctantly. Why? Because I knew once I was finished, I'd have nothing comparable to read. Mary Doria Russell (a Catholic who converted to Judaism) is an excellent writer who is skilled at creating characters that seem real. Her books raise questions that open the mind and encourage conversation. They are wonderful to read alone, but would be great to read and discuss with fellow readers. The story switches between Naples and Rakhat, and spreads between 2060 and 2096 Earth-Relative years. Three different locations are followed - Earth, Rakhat and the ship, *Giordano Bruno*. In addition, we follow the lives of Emilio Sandoz, Sophia Mendes (originally thought dead), and members of a Jana'Ata family, Hlavana Kiteri and his descendants. Despite the many viewpoints, and the time-changes, this is an enjoyable, thought-provoking read. Was Jesuit priest Emilio Sandoz' original mission to Rakhat a success or a failure? Did God let him down? Is there more to be done before

his work is finished? Sandoz is no longer longer judged by the Church's interrogators as a prostitute turned baby-killer. Still healing from the horrors of his experience and doubtful of his relationship with God, he is ready to move on, to make major changes in his life - including giving up his priesthood and marrying. While Emilio is back on Earth, major changes are being made on Rukhat because of the Jesuit sponsored mission that started in the first book. The Runa have slowly begun questioning their sociological position. For centuries they were passive, accustomed to providing the Jana'Ata with everything from childcare to protein.

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