

## books



# All in the Family

UNRAVELING THE CHURCH'S CONFUSION ABOUT MESSIANIC JEWS.

**POSTMISSIONARY  
MESSIANIC JUDAISM:  
Redefining Christian Engagement  
with the Jewish People**  
Mark S. Kinzer  
Brazos, 320 pages, \$24.99

**B**ELIEVE *Yeshua ha-Notzree*, Jesus of Nazareth, is the Messiah. Despite my two Jewish parents (one deceased) and having passed through a *bris* as well as a *bar mitzvah*, many Jews won't consider me part of the *mispocha*, the extended family of Judaism, because of that simple declaration.

At the same time, more than a few Christians would, frankly, prefer that I not be a Jew, at least not too much of one. Forget the Sabbath, the holy days, the dietary laws—they're all abrogated. Israel? Just another nation. God's favor rests on the church now. Indeed, Jews like me, who believe in Jesus, are encouraged simply to assimilate into the church—not too far, perhaps, from Woody Allen's legendary portrayal of a Jew-turned-Christian in *Hannah and Her Sisters*. Unpacking a grocery bag, the convert, played by Allen, removes a loaf of Wonder Bread, a jar of mayonnaise, and, finally, a crucifix.

What's a Jew (who believes in Jesus) to do? For that matter, what's the rest of the church to do with us?

### BRACING CHALLENGE

At a time of fervent interest in the Jewish roots of Christianity, the question of interactions between the church and Jews, let alone Judaism, remains a troubling one, as a recent book highlights.

Mark S. Kinzer, an adjunct professor at Fuller Theological Seminary, tries to steer Christianity back to its Jewish roots. Kinzer aims at the heart of the matter: Are Jews rejected and replaced? His answer is no. He wants Jews to believe in Jesus, or *Yeshua*, but says Jesus needs to be brought to Jews carefully and deliberately, and in a historic context, he argues, that Christians have often ignored.

Kinzer explores passages from the Gospels of Mark and Luke that seem to reject Old Testament observance. He says, "It could be interpreted in this manner, however, only by ignoring the Acts of the Apostles."

Acts affirms Jewish observance for Jewish believers in Jesus. Kinzer notes, "This is true not only at the beginning of the book, but also at the end. This is true not only for Peter and James, but also for Paul! . . . In Acts, Luke presents the Sabbath and holidays as unquestioned components of the Jewish way of life." Such components were not urged on Gentile believers, but they remained

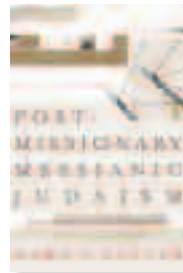
vital for Jewish believers.

Kinzer's stand against what might be viewed as capricious antinomianism is a welcome relief. It's past time, Kinzer declares, for reconciliation. Jewish practice enhances Christian faith. It's also time, he says, for Jews to take a fresher look at Christianity as an extension of their historic faith.

Make no mistake: Kinzer is a Messianic believer whose ultimate goal is seeing Jewish people come to faith in *Yeshua*. But he says the best way to make this happen is for Jews to embrace their heritage in *Yeshua*, not to forsake it for Christian observance.

In answering "replacement theology" (or "supersessionism," the belief that the church has replaced the Jews as God's chosen people), Kinzer's book poses a bracing challenge to a broad spectrum of Protestantism, both evangelical and mainline. Wheaton College's Mark Noll says that supersessionism is now "in play among evangelicals in the way that it was in mainline Protestantism and Catholicism—but wasn't among evangelicals—30 or 40 years ago," as he told *The Washington Post* on January 8, 2006.

Yet Kinzer's ecclesiology has raised concerns among many Messianic evangelicals. The book, after all, discusses



| reviewed by MARK A. KELLNER |

what Kinzer calls a “post-missionary” approach to Messianic Judaism: Jews who believe in *Yeshua* should live a life of Jewish observance as much as possible, within a Messianic community, presumably drawing souls by their lifestyle.

Jews for Jesus’ Rich Robinson, in his own review of Kinzer, identifies a key problem: Kinzer’s declaration that “the

Jewish people remain in covenant with God, with their own distinct calling and way of life intact, despite their apparent communal reject[ion] of *Yeshua*’s divine mediation” is an affront to Paul’s clear teaching that Jews need to be evangelized.

These qualms are enough to trouble many in the Messianic community. They bother me, too. But Kinzer’s strong

stands on supersessionism and antinomi-  
anism are worth serious consideration by Jewish and Gentile believers alike. Both can learn something from him, even as one hopes Kinzer’s thinking on other matters will evolve. ❦

**Mark A. Kellner** is a writer and editor who lives in Rockville, Maryland.

## Grace as a License for Sin

WHY OBEDIENCE ISN’T JUST FOR LEGALISTS.

**E**VANGELICAL commentators from Ron Sider to George Barna have bemoaned the apparent disconnect between Christian beliefs and practice. Robert Jeffress, minister at First Baptist Church of Wichita Falls, Texas, looks at the problem from a pastoral perspective in *Grace Gone Wild: Getting a Grip on God’s Amazing Gift* (WaterBrook, 2005). Stan Guthrie, a CT

senior associate editor, sat down with him.

### Why did you write the book?

There is little to no discernable lifestyle difference between Christians and non-Christians. I believe we’re using grace as a cover, as a license for sin.

### How does this work out?

There’s great confusion on the relation-

ship between grace and works. In the 1990s, Chuck Swindoll and Philip Yancey and others wrote some wonderful books on grace—*The Grace Awakening*, *What’s So Amazing About Grace?*—and they did a valuable service rescuing the doctrine of grace from the legalists who say that we must earn our salvation. But the pendulum has gone in the other direction, and we’ve unwittingly taken grace out of the

## bookmarks

reviewed by **Cindy Crosby, Mark A. Kellner, Mark Noll, John Wilson,**

### THE SOUL OF CHRISTIANITY: Restoring the Great Tradition

Huston Smith • HarperSanFrancisco,  
208 pages • \$22.95



It’s said of certain scholars that they wear their learning lightly. Huston Smith, the eminent scholar of world religions, wears his great erudition like a Polartec fleece, and that’s part of the secret of his charm. Here he writes the sort of book that sums up a lifetime of thinking about the biggest questions. He begins by sketching the human dilemma, both in its perennial aspect and in our historical moment (in Smith’s view, we are living

among the ruins of modernity). But most of the book is devoted to the fulfillment of our restless longing, again both in its perennial form (the “ur-Truth” underlying all great revealed religions) and in the particular form given to our civilization, which is to be found in the Christian tradition.

So winsome is Smith, so appealing is much of his telling of the Christian story, that I found myself wondering why *The Soul of Christianity* is likely to have very little impact. The fatal weakness, I think, is insufficient attention to the resistance of the real. There’s hardly any genuine conflict in this book.

To recognize—as we must—that there is profound truth in Islam and Buddhism, for example, is not to say that these rival understandings of the universe are simply different ways of expressing the same truth found in

Christianity, what Smith (with a nod to Noam Chomsky) calls “the universal grammar of religion.” —J.W.

### VALE OF TEARS: New Essays on Religion and Reconstruction

Edward J. Blum and W. Scott Poole, editors  
Mercer University Press • 265 pages  
\$25.00 (paper), \$49.95 (cloth)

This book supplies fresh research on one of the saddest chapters in American history. It shows how American churches contributed to the subjugation of freed slaves after the Civil War, how Christian leaders helped the Southern Democratic Party violently deprive black citizens of the vote, and how a number of thoroughly evangelical spokesmen (and spokeswomanes) justified lynching as a legiti-

hands of the legalists and delivered it into the hands of the libertarians.

### Have you seen this issue at work in your church?

Absolutely. There are probably more unsaved people in my pews than I want to acknowledge. And as a Southern Baptist, as an evangelical, as a Dallas Theological Seminary graduate, certainly I have preached all of my life the eternal security of the believer or, as Baptists have popularized it, *Once saved, always saved*. But of course, the key part in that phrase is *once saved*.

In the past, I've made the mistake as a pastor of trying to assure people of their salvation when they never possessed it to begin with. Here are people who profess to be Christians, but they have no interest in God's Word, they never pray, they don't want to be in church, there is absolutely no fruit in their life. Why should we give false security to people like that? The Bible



Robert Jeffress

certainly gives no assurance of salvation for such people.

### What do you say to someone who fears you are just trying to reinstitute legalism?

It comes down to the question, *What place does obedience have in the life of a Christian? What does grace say is my responsibility in marriage, in friendships, in the church?* I don't believe that obedience earns God's salvation of our souls. But it certainly earns God's favor in our lives.

### But many Christians who are faithful, who try to obey God, and who try to be true Christian disciples don't experience God's favor. The Christians in Sudan are an obvious example.

I believe there is a payoff for obeying God. I think the mistake is determining when that payoff is going to come.

### What role does church discipline play in this?

Jesus told a parable about a man who was

ambushed and beaten and left for dead. Only one person stopped to render aid. The most loving thing we can do when we see a fellow Christian who's being mugged and left for dead by sin is to stop and render aid. That requires a judgment, but it also requires a restoration procedure.

We've got to delineate what sins actually require discipline. For example, there are personal offenses. If somebody hurts me, the Bible says I'm to forgive. If I see you involved in a harmful addiction, there's nothing that requires me to take you before the church to be disciplined.

Galatians 6:1 says that those who are spiritual are to come alongside such a person.

But there are some sins against the body of Christ that require church actions: sins that threaten the doctrinal health of the church, sins that threaten the emotional health of the church, or sins that threaten the witness of the church. Matthew 18 gives us a procedure. We ought to deal as privately as possible with sins unless they require the church to take action. ✠

| interview by STAN GUTHRIE |

## and W. Jay Wood



mate means for putting black folk "in their place." Several chapters also explain why most Northern reformers quit the struggle against racism after the constitutional victory over slavery.

Points of light include accounts of freed slaves who persevered in the face of great opposition to build strong churches and accounts of a few whites (some from the South) who resisted the regime of racial terror. All the essays are well researched, but Gaines Foster on how the South became the "Bible Belt" and Daniel Stowell on how the word *redemption* came to be used for Jim Crow laws are especially effective.

Thoughtful Americans who wonder why the country has a continuing race problem should read this book; thoughtful Christians should read it and weep. —M.N.

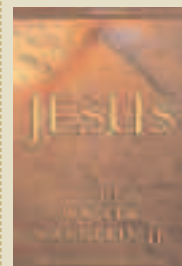
### JESUS: A Novel

Walter Wangerin Jr. • Zondervan, 400 pages • \$21.99

After trying his hand at other stories from the Bible (*The Book of God, Paul*), National Book Award-winner Walter Wangerin Jr. turns his talents to the most familiar story of all: that of Jesus.

Wangerin's earthy sensuality lends richness and vibrancy to scenes such as the wedding feast at Cana. Using alternating viewpoints (John and Mary), he primarily sticks to Scripture, but the novel's strongest moments come when he fills in gaps

(although still maintaining orthodoxy). Especially poignant is a chapter where a confused Mary ("Mim") stands vigil, contemplating the future, while an exhausted, adult Jesus ("Yeshi") sleeps with his head in her lap.



The writing is beautifully crafted, although some of the slang dialogue may jolt unsuspecting readers out of the narrative. ("Ach! Sister, you've been snookered. Nothing good ever came from Nazareth.") The enthusiasm Wangerin brings to this beloved story is contagious, and the historical and cultural details he employs (especially about food and fishing) enrich the text. —C.C.

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# Spong, the Measure of All Things

MAVERICK BISHOP JOUSTS AT LATEST FOE: SCRIPTURE.

## THE SINS OF SCRIPTURE:

Exposing the Bible's Texts of Hate to Reveal the God of Love

John Shelby Spong

HarperSanFrancisco, 315 pages, \$24.95

**C**HRIStIANS who have come to expect stiff opposition from outsiders may be surprised when criticism comes from within—unless, of course, it originates in the study of John Shelby Spong. The author of the highly provocative *Rescuing the Bible from Fundamentalism* (1992) attempts once again to expose the errors of orthodoxy in his latest and heavily publicized book, *The Sins of Scripture*.

Spong contends not simply that con-

servative interpretations of the Bible have produced patriarchy and homophobia. He insists that the Bible itself contains “terrible texts” and “horror stories,” employing contemporary ethics and popular conceptions of God as yardsticks to measure the moral worthiness of various biblical passages. He thus exchanges one ultimate authority (the Bible) for another (the modern consciousness).



Bishop Spong

Spong writes that “the new consciousness of today collides with the old and dying definitions of the past. There is no doubt about how this debate will come out: The new consciousness will not be defeated.” Here and elsewhere, Spong assumes that modern consciousness is superior simply because it is modern.

Moreover, because his moral vision reflects modern Western values, Spong falls prey to vices he reprehends in others: cultural imperialism and Eurocentrism.

Spong quickly becomes one of the most committed Marcionists in church history. (Marcion, A.D. ca. 110–160, rejected all of the Old Testament and large portions of the New as crude and a stumbling block to the Gentiles he sought to evangelize.)

If a text lines up with Spong’s worldview, it merits commendation. If not, it must be scrapped or reinterpreted. For example, “The biblical texts that we Christians have used for centuries to justify our hostility toward the Jews need to be banished forever from the sacred writings of the Christian church.”

Consequently, his book is beset with anachronistic and customized interpretations. For example, the Jesus who comes forth after being subjected to Spong’s

| reviewed by JOHN MAKUJINA |

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## PHILOSOPHY MADE SLIGHTLY LESS DIFFICULT: A Beginner's Guide to Life's Big Questions

Garrett J. DeWeese and J. P. Moreland  
InterVarsity Press, 170 pages • \$15.00



Typical introductions to philosophy make few concessions to beginners. They often require novices to cut their philosophical teeth on texts written for professional philosophers,

with little if any explanation of context and key terms. DeWeese and Moreland have come to the beginner's aid. With clear prose and frequent illustrations and examples, this compact introductory text explores central

philosophical questions.

The authors' aim is expressly apologetic. As former pastors, both think that philosophical training is essential for ministry, especially on university campuses. Curiously, the book lacks a chapter devoted to reasons for believing in God, and it does not treat standard objections to theistic belief arising from human and animal suffering. Anyone wishing to think more critically and philosophically about the contours of a Christian worldview will find this a valuable resource. —W.J.W.

## THE MESSIANIC MOVEMENT: A Field Guide for Evangelical Christians

Rich Robinson • Jews for Jesus, 198 pages • \$10

It's easy for believers—both Jewish and Gentile—to get lost among the various

“Messianics” out there. This handbook is a friendly, reliable, spiritual Baedeker. Edited by veteran Jews for Jesus staffer Rich Robinson, it deftly steers readers through a vast and often confusing realm. Not everything called “Messianic Jewish” is either Messianic



or Jewish. There are many Gentile pretenders, some of whom don ritual Jewish garb, including the *yarmulke* (skullcap) and *tefillin* (phylacteries).

The *Field Guide* offers a concise yet informative history of the Messianic movement and its educational and evangelistic institutions. A section delineates the disagreements Jewish believers in Jesus have



Procrustean bed looks more like a first-century Gandhi or an ethics professor at Berkeley than the divine-human Savior.

Furthermore, Spong rejects the traditional concept of God in favor of Paul Tillich's Ground of Being—simply a life force without self-consciousness or other personal attributes. Yet this Ground of Being, as a mere impulse, is incapable of defining evil, let alone imposing moral imperatives.

This, in fact, proves to be one of the most far-reaching failures in Spong's work: While pronouncing moral judgments on a variety of topics, he fails to demonstrate the foundations of morality (other than the modern consciousness).

## REVISIONIST HISTORY

Just as troubling is Spong's revisionist history, most notably his assertions that Jesus was married to Mary Magdalene and that the apostle Paul was a homosexual. Each argument succeeds by free association and selective reading, pro-



elled by a fertile imagination and deeply seated presuppositions. For instance, Spong argues for Paul's homosexuality by claiming that Paul was struggling with his sexual identity, just like a legalistic clergyman Spong knew who likewise suppressed his homosexuality. He then invokes passages where Paul admits he struggles with the flesh as an indication of Paul's homosexual urges. Evidence to the contrary is quickly dismissed or rendered as not authentically Pauline.

Unfortunately, this type of analysis permeates the book. Whether the issue is anti-intellectualism or anti-Semitism, the bishop—to borrow a line from Gordon Fee—is “jousting still with the windmills of his past.”

That is, Spong leapfrogs from the fundamentalist orientation of his youth to 21st century evangelicalism, without considering the interim. He caricatures evangelicalism, for example, as an intellectual ghetto, thriving on ignorance and unwilling to embrace the advances of

biblical criticism.

Overall, *The Sins of Scripture* comes across as little more than a series of pontifications and ultimatums supported by reasoning that sometimes decays into the platitudes of a village atheist: “It appears to be in the nature of religion itself to be prejudiced against those who are different. . . . Violence is almost always the result of such prejudice.”

One might be tempted to simply dismiss this volume, but Spong's books sell well (which can be the only reason an otherwise reputable publishing house like HarperSanFrancisco would publish something so crude and naïve). And if comments on *Amazon.com* are any sign, Spong still retains a loyal following. This suggests that Spong's worldview—which amounts to the modern consciousness as the ultimate rule of faith and practice—and his hostility to Christian orthodoxy remain a force for the faithful to contend with. ❶

**John Makujina** is associate professor of Old Testament at Central Baptist Theological Seminary.

with Rabbi Yechiel Eckstein, who heads an organization, International Fellowship of Christians and Jews, that gladly receives financial contributions from evangelicals, but who also sternly rejects any notion of Christians' witnessing to Jews.

The heavily sourced *Field Guide* is a detailed and useful primer. It is a must-read for those who want to understand the nature of Messianic Judaism today.

—M.A.K.

**TOTAL ABANDON: The Powerful True Story of Life Lived in Radical Devotion to God**  
Gary Witherall with Elizabeth Cody Newenhuyse  
Tyndale, 176 pages • \$14.99

This tragic story of faith, love, and forgiveness tells of Moody Bible Institute graduates



Bonnie Witherall and her husband, Gary, who vowed to make a difference in the world by entering the mission field. The couple relocated to Sidon, Lebanon, where Bonnie worked in a clinic with poor, pregnant Palestinian women, and Gary assisted two churches.

“It was our love for Jesus that drove us to let go of what normal life could offer,” Gary writes. “We had counted the cost and knew the dangers. We felt that Jesus lived in the same way, with few possessions, no home, and an itinerary that took him to places where people would possibly want to kill him.”

Their dream turned into a nightmare in November 2002, when an unknown assailant incomprehensibly gunned down Bonnie at the clinic. Rather than producing a hagiography, Gary portrays Bonnie as a Christian who experienced her share of doubt.

Journal entries, black-and-white photographs, poems, e-mails, and song lyrics flesh out this slim, passionate memoir.

—C.C.

**Cindy Crosby** is a book author and editor. **Mark A. Kellner** is a writer and editor. **Mark Noll** is McManis Professor of Christian Thought at Wheaton College. **John Wilson** is editor of *BOOKS & CULTURE*. **W. Jay Wood** is an associate professor of philosophy at Wheaton College.