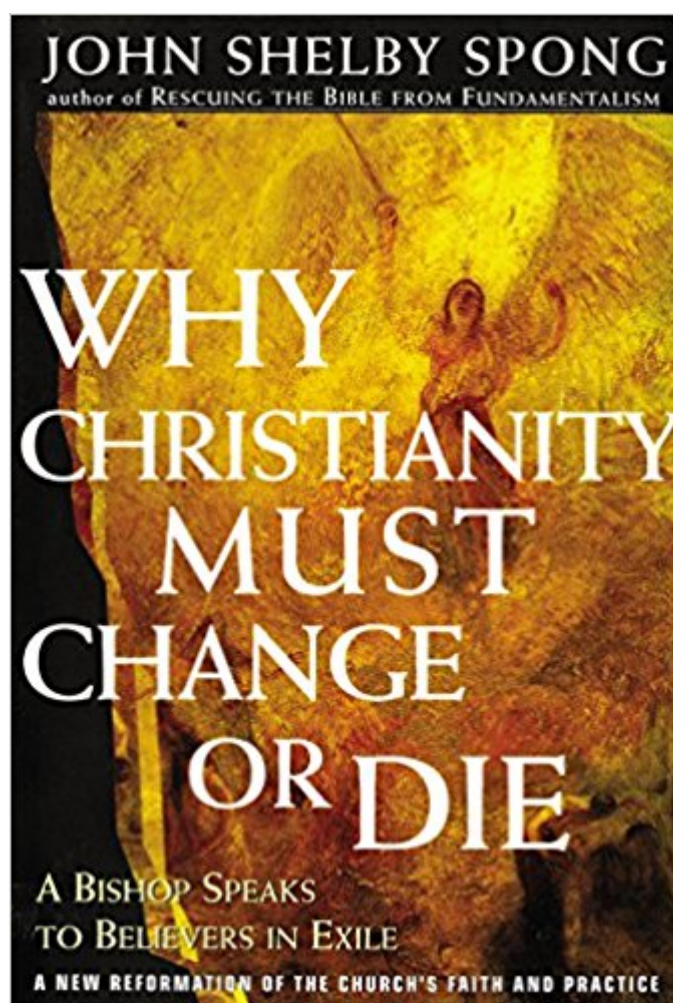


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# Why Christianity Must Change Or Die: A Bishop Speaks To Believers In Exile



## Synopsis

An important and respected voice for liberal American Christianity for the past twenty years, Bishop John Shelby Spong integrates his often controversial stands on the Bible, Jesus, theism, and morality into an intelligible creed that speaks to today's thinking Christian. In this compelling and heartfelt book, he sounds a rousing call for a Christianity based on critical thought rather than blind faith, on love rather than judgment, and that focuses on life more than religion.

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## Customer Reviews

John Shelby Spong is the Episcopal Bishop of Newark, New Jersey, and has enjoyed a career filled with controversy, much of it thanks to his many bestselling books, such as *Born of a Woman*, *Living in Sin?*, and *Liberating the Gospels*. He has tapped into an audience of people who are at once spiritually starved and curious, yet unwilling or unable to embrace Christianity. Spong refers to himself as a believer in exile. He believes the world into which Christianity was born was limited and provincial, particularly when viewed from the perspective of the progress in knowledge and technology made over the past two millennia. This makes any ideas or beliefs formulated in 1st-century Judea totally inadequate to our progressive minds and lives today. So Spong is in exile until Christianity is re-formed to discard all of the outdated and, according to Spong, false tenets of Christianity. He begins his book by exposing the Apostles Creed line by line, then methodically moves on through the heart of Christian belief, carefully exploring each aspect, demonstrating in each case the inadequacies of Christianity as detailed in the Bible and in the traditions of the

Church. The epilogue includes Spong's own creed, recast to reflect the beliefs he considers relevant to Christianity at the end of the 20th century. Oddly enough, Spong's views do not seem particularly new. In fact, his views seem very much in keeping with the religious humanist variety of Unitarianism. What is remarkable is not the beliefs themselves, but that an Episcopal bishop would be the one to embrace and espouse them. Spong has become a trumpeter in the battle of beliefs, not just in the Episcopal communion, but in the realm of Christian faith in general in this country. His books are bestsellers and are in turn, presumably, read by those who, whether they agree or disagree, all acknowledge that in some way, Spong is involved in setting the agenda. This book, as the admitted "summation of his life's work" tells every reader what the complete agenda will be, for the next few years at least. --Patricia Klein --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

"This is an important contribution to the Christian dilemma of our time. With reverence, courage, and compassion, Bishop Spong helps his readers to articulate their difficulties with the conception of God and, in so doing, to take the first step toward a creative resolution." -- Karen Armstrong, author of "A History of God"

"Bishop Spong is a passionate, illuminating original. His knowledgeable concern for the future of Christianity offers strength, hope, and theological solutions." -- Clarissa Pinkola Estés, Ph.D., author of "Women Who Run with the Wolves, The Gift of Story, " and "The Faithful Gardener"

"Should be required reading for everyone concerned with facing head-on the intellectual and spiritual challenges of late-twentieth-century religious life." -- Karen L. King, Harvard Divinity School

"Spong demolishes the stifling dogma of traditional Christianity in search of the inner core of truth. This book is a courageous, passionate attempt to build a credible theology for a skeptical, scientific age." -- Paul Davies, author of "The Mind of God"

"This is Spong's manifesto, offering his vision for the institution he made his career serving." -- "Library Journal"

To paraphrase Tony Curtis's character in "Some Like it Hot," John Shelby Spong is a genius • his opinions exactly coincide with mine. For years, decades in fact, I have been a "Christian in exile," but didn't know it until reading "Why Christianity Must Change or Die." This book is a godsend (possibly literally) for people who have grown up in the Christian tradition and desperately believe in the holiness of the spirit and person of Jesus, but have found it impossible to reconcile contemporary rationality with a confusing and myth-filled explanation of thoughts, feelings, and beliefs of a group of believers of two-thousand years ago. Bishop Spong lays out the difficulties with the Christian

religion in the modern era, the sources of conflict and confusion, and suggests ways in which we believers can reconcile ourselves with the original intention of Jesus and still call ourselves Christians. Finally, we can know we are still following the faith even though we recognize mythology and allegory in the foundational writing and traditions of the faith. So far, I have only read one other book by Bishop Spong, "Liberating the Gospels: Reading the Bible with Jewish Eyes; Freeing Jesus from 2,000 years of Misunderstanding," and I highly recommend it also to help the "Christian in exile" understand the beliefs and traditions of the authors of the Bible. Only by understanding the society and worldview of the authors can one understand the intention behind their words. Both books are written with the knowledge of a scholar and the craftsmanship of an artist of the English language. They are compelling, to the point, and beautifully written. Ideas are presented clearly, logically, and explained in a way that flows naturally and organically from one to the next. If you are a fundamentalist, one who needs to understand the Bible literally, you will not find comfort in Bishop Spong's ideas. But anyone else, whether "Christian in exile," Jew, Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, or any other faith, even atheist, will find these two books compelling and eye opening.

Bishop John Shelby Spong's book will undoubtedly change the reader's perspective on religion in the 21st century. Whether you are a devout Christian, a confirmed Atheist, or somewhere in the middle, you'll find that this book casts a new light on religion. It certainly provides food for thought and is an interesting read.

It was a wonderful read that took a scholarly look at religion. It opened new pathways to experience religion and most especially Christian religion. For me it was support for a view that I have held for quite some time and perhaps will point me toward a future view that I am exploring.

I had read probably a half dozen or so of Bishop Spong's books by the time I got to this one, including a later related book, "A New Christianity for a New World." Maybe it's because I had previously been introduced to God as Ground of All Being (which confused the heck out of me at first) and have since had some time to try to understand that mystical concept, but the explanations in this book finally made sense and brought it closer to home for me. I can understand the concept more clearly, although I am still trying to relate to this new kind of "God." As I have turned away from the external theistic Being "up there" (or

ÃfÂçÃ â ¬Ã Å“out thereÃfÂçÃ â ¬Ã Å”), I really had a hard time figuring out the place of prayer. I had struggled for so long in trying to be a traditionally prayerful person to no avail. Of course there was a reason, as the good Bishop points out in his chapter on Prayer, if I no longer believe in this external Being, then of course I wouldnÃfÂçÃ â ¬Ã â„et have any idea how to pray or to what or whom!! SpongÃfÂçÃ â ¬Ã â„s chapter on Prayer drew a hallelujah from me.

HeÃfÂçÃ â ¬Ã â„s been there, done that. Now prayer for me isnÃfÂçÃ â ¬Ã â„et just a bunch of words, but prayer is action: to be there for others, to serve, and in SpongÃfÂçÃ â ¬Ã â„s words, to love ÃfÂçÃ â ¬Ã Å“wastefully.ÃfÂçÃ â ¬Ã Å•This is my favorite book of all-time having ANYTHING to do with Christianity, God, Jesus or religion of any kind. I will read it over and over again. I always read with a highlighter ÃfÂçÃ â ¬Ã â œ in this book, many pages are totally highlighted. The explanations for why Bishop Spong can no longer accept the traditional dogmas and creeds of the Church ÃfÂçÃ â ¬Ã Å“filled in the blanksÃfÂçÃ â ¬Ã Å• for me and gave a new impetus to my journey as a Believer in Exile. Like Bishop Spong, I am an Episcopalian who can no longer accept the traditional Christian doctrines of the virgin birth, incarnation, atonement, an Easter ÃfÂçÃ â ¬Ã Å“resuscitationÃfÂçÃ â ¬Ã Å• or a bodily ascension beyond the clouds (all of which are masterfully dealt with in this book). I have long since given up believing in a God who is the Master Puppeteer in the Sky. But, again like Bishop Spong, I canÃfÂçÃ â ¬Ã â„et give up Jesus ÃfÂçÃ â ¬Ã â œ IÃfÂçÃ â ¬Ã â„cm not talking about the Jesus of miracles and magic, nor the Jesus of the creeds and the Trinity ÃfÂçÃ â ¬Ã â œ but the Jesus whom I have experienced, who in his holiness has touched God. There I was in my confusion and unbelief, not knowing where to turn. And then there was this book ÃfÂçÃ â ¬Ã â œ it was as if it was written for me personally! I applaud Spong for being courageous and honest in addressing the irrelevancy of age-old doctrines and creeds dealing with biblical inerrancy, creationism, rewards, punishments and Judgment Day, while so-called ÃfÂçÃ â ¬Ã Å“religiousÃfÂçÃ â ¬Ã Å• people often ignore human rights, whether they be for women, homosexuals or minorities. (In fact, neither the Church nor the Scriptures have always stood for equal rights for people in these three categories!) IÃfÂçÃ â ¬Ã â„ve read similar material by other writers, but none of them ÃfÂçÃ â ¬Ã â œ unlike Spong ÃfÂçÃ â ¬Ã â œ appear to want to lead the present-day Church into the 21st century. I have resisted throwing out the proverbial baby with the bath water, and now thanks to Bishop Spong, I donÃfÂçÃ â ¬Ã â„et have to! IÃfÂçÃ â ¬Ã â„ll just change the bath water...If I were even a partially traditional Christian and not a ÃfÂçÃ â ¬Ã Å“believer in exile,ÃfÂçÃ â ¬Ã Å• this would have been a very disturbing book. Although I am 80 years old, I am a 21st-century woman, and this 21st-century ÃfÂçÃ â ¬Ã Å“believer in exileÃfÂçÃ â ¬Ã Å•

thinks this book is TERRIFIC! It is well-written, easy to read and understand, and has been a  
“Godsend” for me! Before all is said and done, I will have read all of  
Spong’s books, and some of them I will read several times. I wish I could tell him  
how much his books, this one in particular, have meant to me, in helping to guide my journey into  
exile....

Bishop Spong’s addresses the basic tenets of Christianity in a thoughtful and transparent manner.  
The book offers hope for believers who hold onto the reality of God but have outgrown the  
intellectual and moral bankruptcy of evangelicalism and conservative Christianity.

Retired bishop sponge from newark, NJ is one of the worlds leading biblical scholars and a true  
advocate for peace and ecumenism. He tells it like it is and has a plan for humanity. This plan sets  
people from diverse faith based communities on a mutual quest where all contribute respectfully in  
our post modern world. Since divine truth is the goal and not sectarian dogmas of the past we truly  
can learn from each other Buddhist, moslem , christian, even atheists make valuable contributions.  
A must read for a god loving, person loving, world loving individual and doubly so for theologians all  
sects.

Excellent book, open ideas, a lot people need to read that because is the opportunity to help with  
the real Jesus’ idea

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