



## The Gospel according to The Simpsons, Bigger and Possibly Even Better!

By Mark I. Pinsky

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The Simpsons is one of the longest running, funniest, most irreverent, and, according to some religious leaders, the most theologically relevant show on television today. Journalist Mark Pinsky explores the religious and spiritual aspects of Bart, Homer, and the rest of cartoon's first family—a show strongly denounced by many conservative Christians back in 1989, but now viewed favorably by fans from all across the theological spectrum.

Pinsky looks at the use of God, Jesus, heaven and hell, the Bible, prayer in the Simpson household, the evangelistic next-door neighbor Ned Flanders, and the town's church and pastor, Rev. Lovejoy. He also discusses whether the character of Lisa is the voice of Jesus, and explores the many moral dilemmas that the characters, in particular Bart and Homer, face. Pinsky concludes with a discussion that suggests that, on the whole, The Simpsons is supportive and not subversive of faith. This is must reading for any Simpsons' fan, and an insightful exploration of how religion and faith influences popular culture.

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### Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Religion journalist Pinsky offers a thoughtful and genuinely entertaining review of faith and morality as reflected through the irreverently sweet comedy of *The Simpsons*, drawing on a wide if not encyclopedic knowledge of key episodes and interviews with the series' creators. The animated series is unique in many ways, including its longevity and creative freshness, but no less remarkable is the show's attention to religious themes especially considering the prevalent invisibility or irrelevance of religion on TV. A recent convert to the show who only started watching in 2001, Pinsky had been repelled by controversy surrounding the series' edgier early seasons. But as the program and its characters have matured, many viewers have seen a fundamental affirmation of spirituality, family and community life that emerges in spite of the sarcasm and exaggerated situations. Chapters are devoted to important characters Homer, Lisa, Ned Flanders, Reverend Lovejoy, Krusty and Apu and the faiths they represent, as well as to issues such as images of God, the Bible, prayer and ethics. Pinsky reminds readers that ultimately *The Simpsons* is played for laughs, not deep spiritual or sociological insight. Yet the abiding charm of the show is how often its caricatures are devastatingly on-target and point to a deeper truth, as Tony Campolo points out in an excellent foreword: "Do not go too hard on Homer Simpson because more people in our churches are where he is than any of us in the mainline denominations want to acknowledge." (Sept.) Forecast: One of WJKP's longest-selling titles has been *The Gospel According to Peanuts*, which clearly provided a model for this new rumination on faith and popular culture. Here's hoping that Pinsky's book achieves similar success; given the publisher's recent economic troubles (see PW's "Religion BookLine" newsletter, July 9), the small Presbyterian press could really use a hit.

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From [Booklist](#)

On the heels of *The Simpsons and Philosophy* [BKL Ap 15 01] comes a seriously funny examination of the spirituality of the popular TV show. The Simpsons, after all, spend more time in church than any other TV family, though Homer can still only describe his religion as, "you know, the one with all the well-meaning rules that don't work in real life. Uh, Christianity." Pinsky makes a compelling argument that the show's writers' view of religious expression is complicated and sympathetic, despite the lampooning of fundamentalist Ned Flanders and Springfield's apathy toward Lisa's Jesus-like social activism. Pinsky, who is Jewish, may be a bit more immune to the Simpsonian critiques of Christian excesses than some fundamentalists, and excessive quotation from the show sometimes makes the book confusing and out of focus. As in *The Simpsons and Philosophy*, however, those quotations are invariably laugh-out-loud funny, and in the end, no one--not even Baptist activist Tony Campolo, who contributed the foreword to this book--can keep from laughing at and with TV's most religious family. *John Green*

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Review

"The Simpsons is one of the most subtle pieces of propaganda around in the cause of sense, humility and virtue. Mark Pinsky manages to decipher the code without deadening the humour, which is quite an achievement." The Right Revd Dr Rowan Williams, Archbishop of Wales

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