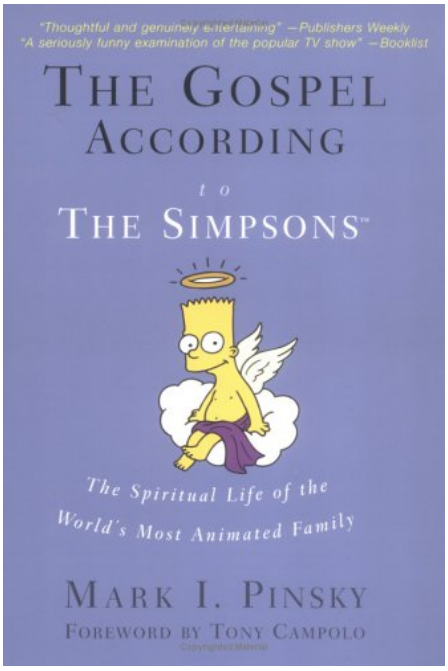

The Gospel According to the Simpsons

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How did The Simpsons, one of the most popular television shows in history go from being attacked by many religious leaders for its lack of family values to being called one of the most theologically relevant programs in prime time?

The Gospel According to the Simpsons Details

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From Reader Review The Gospel According to the Simpsons for online ebook

Matthew says

When I was younger my parents discouraged me from watching things like "the Simpsons" therefore when I got older I watched it every chance I could get. When I was in Seminary I came across this book in the seminary book store and have to say I really enjoyed reading it. Some of the things the author reads into the cartoon's storyline are a bit stretched or at best an exercise in "creative thinking" but he is never so far off that I couldn't see his side of things and I found many of his observations very insightful... for instance (SPOILER WARNING)

What does it mean that the character of God (whenever God appears) is an older white man? And what does it mean that people in the Simpsons Universe only have four fingers but whenever we see God, God is different from the people in that God has five fingers???

IF you like thinking about how a series like this informs the debate about "art reflecting life" or "life being affected by art" then this book is for you.

If you think this issue or this television series isn't really important enough to have a book like written about it, think about this... Christianity Today did a research study and found that the Most Recognized Christian in the United States was a character on The Simpsons named Ned Flanders... they wrote

"Today on American college and high school campuses, the name most associated with the word Christian—other than Jesus—is not the Pope or Mother Teresa or even Billy Graham. Instead, it's a goofy-looking guy named Ned Flanders on the animated sitcom known as The Simpsons."

This show has won dozens of awards as a series, including 25 Primetime Emmy Awards, 26 Annie Awards and a Peabody Award. Time magazine's December 31, 1999 issue named it the 20th century's best television series, and on January 14, 2000 the Simpson family was awarded a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame. The Simpsons is the longest-running American sitcom, the longest-running American animated program, and in 2009 it surpassed Gunsmoke as the longest running American primetime entertainment series. Homer's exclamatory catchphrase "D'oh!" has been adopted into the English lexiconan. (according to Wikipedia)

So it is no surprise to me that with such a long running history and seeing how often the church is portrayed as a central character and faith as a central theme throughout many so many episodes that a creative writer would be able to come up with a good read like this one. I recommend this to anyone who is irreverent, has a good sense of humor and enjoys thinking about how faith, daily life, and pop culture intertwine in the real world.

Dan says

This book is in the same Vein as The Philosophy of Seinfeld, and "The D'oh of Homer." I read it because I liked those other books.

This book contains several essays about how religion is portrayed in "The Simpsons." The general thesis is

that while The Simpsons seems to be superficially irreverent the tv show accurately reflects the spirituality of the American people and how Americans relate to religion.

This book is pretty good. I found it slow at times. However, I found it generally informative and interesting.

Bevan Boychuk says

Did not read the additional afterword chapter looking at other shows and cartoons, as I was only interested in the Simpsons stuff. I found this book a really fun and interesting read. I never really put together how much religion is touched upon on the show and this booked really gave me a new perspective on my memories. I will need to go back and rewatch for these things.

David Dixon says

Washington City Paper
Arts & Entertainment : Book Review

Does Springfield Have a Prayer?
By Glenn Dixon • February 8, 2002

They may be a beloved national institution now, but when the Simpsons first moved into the prime-time neighborhood, not everybody was ready to send out the welcome wagon. A kinder, gentler America wasn't sure that young minds needed a role model like that wiseacre Bart, not to mention a father figure like that dunderhead Homer. The bratty, cynical mind-set of Matt Groening's alternative comic strip "Life in Hell" had infected the airwaves, and cultural conservatives dug in for a fight. Brickbats were hurled, prudently hurled, by George and Barbara Bush. An Orange County, Calif., elementary school banished Bart shirts from its halls. Bill Bennett warned a few lucky Pittsburgh residents that a devotion to "The Simpsons" wouldn't help them make it through rehab. Souls were at stake.

It's now more than a decade later, and we're on a new regimen of Bushes (like colonics, they help to purge the system; can't wait 'til the girls are ready for the Grand Old Par-tay), but Homer, Marge, Bart, Lisa, and Maggie are still with us, and Springfield is comfortably enshrined as Anytown, U.S.A. George the First may still be muttering in his rocker up in his corner of Kennebunkport, but a new generation of serious religious types has made strange bedfellows of reverence and irreverence and negotiated a tenuous peace with the fat, bald, yellow man who recently told Esquire, "There are many different religions in this world, but if you look at them carefully, you'll see that they all have one thing in common: They were invented by a giant, superintelligent slug named Dennis."

According to Orlando Sentinel religion reporter Mark I. Pinsky, the author of "The Gospel According to 'The Simpsons'," a book that purports to essay the spiritual underpinnings of Fox's Sunday-night institution, Homer and his brood, however quirky their theology, represent a safe haven for family values in the crazy world of the cathode ray. And he's not alone. The Most Rev. Rowan Williams, archbishop of Wales, goes so far as to write, "'The Simpsons' is one of the most subtle pieces of propaganda around in the cause of sense, humility, and virtue."

So what gives?

It appears to be a classic case of "If you can't beat 'em, join 'em" (remember when cartoon characters actually used to voice that sentiment aloud?), an attitude that in recent years has given us no less a paragon of interfaith detente than "Pat Boone in a Metal Mood: No More Mr. Nice Guy," on which God's own slice of milquetoast performs Metallica and Judas Priest covers. Just as Captain Whitebucks could sensibly board the shredwagon once metal had passed from drug-addled social threat to treasured musical landmark, so religious conservatives can embrace the Simpsons now that their nuclear family has outlasted many real-world ones.

Pinsky is aided in his apologia by the fact that "The Simpsons" is chockablock with religious references. But he accomplishes little more than amassing and categorizing their many instances. There are chapters on Evangelicals, Catholics, Jews, Hindus, the Bible, "Moral Dilemmas," the role of the church, and the destiny of the soul. Characters are tagged with the brands of belief they exemplify. "If the Simpsons' next-door neighbor Ned Flanders is an exemplar of evangelical Christianity," Pinsky writes, "Lisa represents the essence of mainline denominations, with their commitment to a socially conscious gospel and rational, religious humanism."

Analysis, however, is Pinsky's weak suit. Time and again, he draws maddeningly close to actual insight, only to veer back into the stream of his book-length notebook dump. He observes, for instance, that "[i]n contrast to some other series characters, Lisa retains her essential nature even in fantasy episodes," but he never broaches the larger question of what importance essential nature plays in the normal, "non-fantasy" Simpsons universe. Consequently, he misunderstands the writers'-room balancing act that has earned the show such longevity.

Snpp.com (the initials stand for Springfield Nuclear Power Plant) reports that writers are given carte blanche to rearrange the floor plan of the Simpsons' house as dramatic needs dictate. Likewise, features of the town itself, geographic and architectural, are not set in stone. Similar license extends to the characters. Though slotted into position as a lovable dolt, Homer is more or less smart as situations dictate, and an impoverished intellect never gets in the way of a good gag; his knowledge base simply swells to fit the joke ("Oh, Bartholomew. I feel like Saint Augustine of Hippo after his conversion by Ambrose of Milan"). Homer's attitude is also up for grabs; online fanboys regularly bitch about lamer episodes that lazily resort to "Jerkass Homer" for a few laughs. And Lisa, usually wise beyond her years, acts girlish and immature if the need arises. Bart is either untrammeled id personified or a fully rounded, occasionally conscience-stricken 10-year-old boy--it all depends on what week it is.

If this slipperiness bothers you, it shouldn't. It's all part of the divine plan--of "The Simpsons"' creators. There are basically two kinds of episodes: those in which the dramatic developments take (i.e., persist into other episodes) and those in which they don't (everything returning to normal by next Sunday night, as if the closing credits trip some kind of reset switch). The former category mainly involves the misfortunes of minor characters, such as the divorce of Bart's friend Milhouse's parents or the death of Maude Flanders; the latter comprises the outlandish exploits of the major players, the "situations" from which the sitcom genre derives its name.

Because Pinsky craves the reassurance that such tales offer, he emphasizes those episodes in the lives of the main characters that essentially play it straight with the family unit, those whose dramatic arc involves threatening and then affirming, often in a sentimental and straightforward manner, the sanctity of familial bonds. And he downplays the significance of those more sophisticated episodes in which the family bedrock is made into a stage on which to play out elaborate jokes about the nature of narrative formula. Pinsky dwells

on the moral seriousness of "Homer vs. Lisa and the Eighth Commandment," in which Homer struggles mightily with his decision to steal cable TV service, but he overlooks "The Boy Who Knew Too Much." In that half-hour, Bart's moral quandary ('fess up to playing hooky or keep mum at a trial of a falsely accused wastrel) takes center stage, even though it is rendered moot by the Quimby clan's purchase of testimony that will set its scion free. The only effect Bart's testimony will have is to secure for himself Draconian punishment for a minor misdeed. As if the moral scales weren't sufficiently upset, Homer behaves very badly (deliberately deadlocking the jury so he can be sequestered in the plush Springfield Palace Hotel, then stealing from his room everything that isn't nailed down) and suffers no consequence. It would take a lot of stolen Animal Planet to equal the value of the table lamps, sconces, monogrammed linens, barware, and paintings that Homer carts home.

Pinsky also applauds Marge's and Homer's fidelity when they are tempted, respectively, by Jacques, the lubricious bowling Lothario, and Lurleen Lumpkin, the compassionate country chanteuse. But when Homer takes Ned to Vegas to loosen him up and they end up getting soused and marrying cocktail waitresses, Pinsky takes comfort in "matches apparently not consummated." He is either innocent of the order of business in drunken Vegas nuptials or privy to inside information about the quantity of liquor consumed. So willing is Pinsky to turn a blind eye to any "anti-family" data that he sidesteps the issue of homosexuality altogether, regardless of the guest appearances of Harvey Fierstein and John Waters, a censorious Bible reference posted in Ned's kitchen, and the long-running joke of the cruelly unrequited longing of Smithers for his boss.

At the heart of Pinsky's enterprise is a canard about the purpose of religion (or perhaps just a carefully cloaked admission of the nature of its current utility). He notes that the regodding of America is rooted in baby-boomer concern over child-rearing, having already made an example of Marge, who "has an obligation to raise the children with moral values, and church is a part of that obligation." He likens the household of the real-life Dan and Lorraine Hardaway, a Campus Crusade for Christ-er and homemaker who "[e]ach experienced some degree of dysfunction earlier in life before turning to Jesus," to the fictional family of Ned Flanders, a recovering alcoholic (well, sometimes) and former hellion raised by permissive beatnik parents.

But you should believe in something because it's true, not because it's useful. The validity of a belief system shouldn't hinge on whether you've got unruly urchins to indoctrinate or pesky chemical dependencies to wriggle free of. Of course, in today's America, millions worship not because it is good but because it's good for you. Not for nothing does Ned recommend "a daily dose of vitamin Church."

It isn't church that makes Ned good, though. It's the dramatic requirement for a goody-two-shoes. Pinsky may consider "The Simpsons" a case of "cloaking the sacred with the profane," but it's really a matter of satire overlaying smarm. What makes "The Simpsons" unique, or did so when it was new--now every Fox sitcom, from "Titus" to "Grounded for Life," avails itself of attitudes that were taboo before Bart came along--is not its affirmation of the family, long a TV staple, but the keenness of its satire, pulled straight out of the secular-humanist handbook (which also happens to contain a chapter on raising kids).

When Pinsky is actually thinking about God (a religious construct), instead of goodness (a secular concern--you really think Lisa will still go to church when she grows up?), he makes much of the fact that in "The Simpsons" God is drawn with five fingers, the local standard being four, thumb included. Pinsky claims this is because, "unlike the other characters in the series, He is real." As Leo Steinberg has shown, for centuries the aim of naturalistic visual depiction of Christ was to emphasize the reality of the incarnation by making him appear as we do (right down to the weenie). But that logic assumes that the dominant representational mode is realist; the theory is turned on its head where caricature reigns, when the cartoon's four-fingered world is the one we recognize as a mirror of our own. A five-fingered God the Father in a semi-surreal four-

fingered world is an anti-incarnational device, one emphasizing His distance from the everyday, an interpretation entirely consistent with what Pinsky admits is the show's rather Old Testament perspective of the Almighty. Emmanuel be damned--God is not with us. And He probably isn't watching "The Simpsons," either. So if He is not mocked, it's only because, as we've long suspected, He's not paying attention.

And He's not the only one. Pinsky and his ilk have adjusted their rose-colored glasses until "The Simpsons'" persistent irreverence toward God is relatively untroubling to them. What bothers them is that so many people in the five-fingered world (both televised and not) are getting along just fine without Him. "Hipper" religious conservatives are thankful that "The Simpsons" at least gets God out of the pop-culture deep freeze. Gerry Bowler, a philosophy prof at Canadian Nazarene College (couldn't Pinsky dig up a source from an institution that at least sounds accredited?) claims, "The satiric Simpsons program takes religion's place in society seriously enough to do it the honor of making fun of it." Blithe inattention to God can't be explained away, but ridicule of Him can always be spun.

Which means that Pinsky and his battery of supporters, whose testimonials are sprinkled throughout the text, have a vested cultural interest in getting the joke without admitting that the joke has gotten them. "The Gospel According to 'The Simpsons'" evokes an image of a curiously pixilated paschal lamb, not heedless to its impending slaughter but happily halfway to being shish kebab, numb to the heat and proud to have been accorded a place on the skewer. CP

Michael Berg says

This book was very difficult to read because it could not hold my interest.

To me, it seems like this book is a typical religious person over analyzing something that doesn't really matter; trying to see something that isn't really there, and if it was indeed there, it wasn't put there "by God", it just happened (mostly because the show was required to be suitable for mainstream TV). The show did push boundries, but still had certain limits in order to remain on air - such as the "family orientation" aspects of the show and being careful about what was said about religion. This was the work of standard television regulation and contracts, not God.

What the author says about The Simpsons could be said about ANY show, but The Simpsons happen to be popular, so he popped out a book to make some money. In fact, someone also wrote "The Gospel According to Lost" and "The Gospel According to Harry Potter", probably for the same reason ($$$).

Overall if your a Simpsons fan and not religious, like I am, I urge you not to waste your time reading this book. I regret the $14.95 and few hours of my life I spent on this book. However, religious people ate it up (just look at other reviews on this site...).

Emily says

As an avid Simpsons fan, this book really presented me with no new information. The majority of it was describing episodes that had religion or ethics related plots. I seen ever episode, so it was a waste of time. I would rather watch the episode than have someone else tell me about it.

Mark says

I had this on audiobook, and--to be honest--I kept skipping ahead. It just didn't hold my interest, and didn't impress me very much. Once in a while it felt like there was some real study of sociology, religion, or television going on. Most of the time, though, it felt like endless stories of "Remember that time when Homer prayed for _____? Or when Ned Flanders did this ridiculous thing that really showed he's a good guy at heart?" In other words, too many Simpsons stories, not nearly enough analysis.

Still, I may use this as a hook to talk to my son, though it proved to be far less than I hoped.

Robert says

Made me remember a number of episodes so was difficult not to laugh while I read.
Surprised to find that hard-core atheists hate the Simpsons

J.D. says

You might be thinking "what could America's most famous dysfunctional family have to do with religion?" Of course, when you think about it, the Simpsons are probably the most religious family on television. They're about the only sitcom family that attends church every week and prays before eating every dinner. Their show is also one of the few comedies that regularly discusses religious topics. From teaching about the power of personal prayer ("Bart Gets an F" and "Bart Sells His Soul"), the importance of attending church meetings ("Homer the Heretic"), or the struggle to keep the commandments when those around you aren't ("Lisa vs. the Eighth Commandment") this book shows us how much spiritual wisdom (or often the incredible lack thereof--courtesy of Homer) can be found in the misadventures of t.v.'s longest-running sitcom family.

Johnny says

Early in the introduction to *The Gospel According to The Simpsons*, the great 20th century theological voice, Reinhold Niebuhr, is quoted: “Humor is a prelude to faith, and laughter is the beginning of prayer.” (p. 5) This is immediately followed by an observation that humor which is not founded upon a faith presupposition has a tendency to degenerate into cynicism and despair, while faith that doesn’t allow humor can quickly devolve into arrogance and intolerance. The entire book is predicated on this idea that humor expresses and informs faith. In some circles (including some where I’ve ministered), this is a bold step.

Mark Pinsky, the author of *The Gospel According to The Simpsons* is of Jewish background himself, but as a journalist on the religion beat, he is astute enough to recognize that the “religion” espoused by the characters on “The Simpsons” is *not* the New Testament gospel of grace but a confluence of the idea of “good works” and distorted Old Testament sentiments. In fact, Homer seems to indicate in another episode what many modern people believe. Bart asks him what kind of religion the family is part of and Homer responds, “You

know, the one with all the well-meaning rules that don't work in real life. Uh, Christianity." (p. 22) Authentic Bible verses are often deliberately misquoted and characters like Homer (and even the ironically named Rev. Lovejoy (who apparently doesn't love joy)) occasionally mix in gibberish and pop culture without even the sophistication of Tevye's occasional references to the "good book" in *Fiddler on the Roof* (I don't know what his "good book" is, but it isn't the Torah as most of us know it.).

With years of journalism behind him, the author also knows that the series doesn't depict everything about the church as authentically as possible. For example, he cannot understand how a pastor as ineffective as Lovejoy doesn't have to deal with factionalism. He writes about disputes within churches and synagogues: "I have come to believe that the reason this occurs so frequently and can lead to so much bitterness and intense fighting is the depth of feeling people have about spiritual matters. I think it may also be a function of the powerlessness people experience in other spheres of their lives: work, home, school, government bureaucracy, and the political system." (p. 61)

Pinsky shows how this religion is handled both with sensitivity and authenticity at times, but is even more often exposed as the idolatry it is. For example, characters constantly try to bargain with God as though God is an angry deity whose wrath has to be placated. On pp. 13-14, Pinsky reminded me of an episode where Homer offers milk and cookies to God as part of a "plea" bargain and then, suggests that if God doesn't intend for Homer himself to consume the milk and cookies, God should show *NO* sign. When nothing happens, Homer eats the milk and cookies as "God's will." It's perverse, but it also satirizes the way some who claim to be believers still try to manipulate God, confusing faith and magic. By the way, in the episode, God gets the last laugh because Homer's bargain was for God to leave everything exactly as it was and he soon discovers that Marge is pregnant with Maggie.

One of the delights of reading a book like this is discovering some juicy excerpts from episodes one may have missed. I didn't see the one where Homer ended up on a primitive island and forced the natives to build a church. Homer unwittingly expresses the ideas of many people with regard to institutional religion when he says, "I don't know much about God, but I have to say we built a pretty nice cage for him." (p. 17) There was also the time when Barney, the town drunk, indicated that he was clueless about the New Testament account of the resurrection because he says that Jesus "must be spinning in his grave." (p. 22)

It's even interesting how the series expresses an interesting mixture between the possible supernatural and the responsibility of humans. Remember the episode where Bart has failed the test and isn't ready to retake it? He begs God for one more day to study and gets that magical, mystery snow day. He studies and passes the test by one point, offering in exuberant thanksgiving to give God part of the credit for his "D-." (p. 31) Whether believers think something miraculous has happened in answer to their prayers or that the event might be a coincidence, it seems clear that one has the utmost responsibility to do one's best—even if it's only to earn a "D-." Of course, what really troubles me is when people pray and accept that "D-" as though it's all God could do for them.

Sometimes, the humor cuts both ways. The superintendent's words when he fires Ned Flanders from his job as interim principal of the elementary school reflect as poorly on liberals who think faith is irrational as upon believers who try to force their faith on others. "God has no place within these walls, just like the facts have no place in organized religion." (p. 45) Pinsky also doesn't "call" the writers on Rev. Lovejoy's syncretistic comment when he performs Apu's wedding (even though Apu has been both a Hindu and dabbled briefly into Scientology). Lovejoy says, "Christ is Christ" and implies that the Christ of Christianity is the same as some New Age concept of divinity within each human (p. 127).

There was also a principle of Judaism that Pinsky introduced me to with regard to the counsel given to Lisa

regarding her family's theft of a pirate cable television signal. The principle is called *shalom bayit* ("peace in the home") and means "…family harmony should prevail whenever possible, with an emphasis on flexibility, without compromising personal integrity." (p. 86) Lisa is encouraged not to participate in the television watching and to quietly express to her family why she cannot be part of the activity. I also loved a line from that episode where we learn about Krusty the Klown's background. As his rabbi father was *kvelling* about how wonderful his son was. The rabbi is accused of exaggerating and he responds, "A rabbi composes. He creates thoughts. He tells stories that may never have happened. But he does not exaggerate!" (p. 114) It's a great callback to a comment attributed to Elie Wiesel that some stories are "true" that never happened. Wiesel was suggesting that stories usually express higher truths than commandments and facts. Somehow, such a statement seems appropriate in the light of the delightful analysis of the series presented in *The Gospel According to The Simpsons*.

Neil says

"A teachers' strike, a power failure, a blizzard ... Anything that'll cancel school tomorrow. I know it's asking a lot, but if anyone can do it, you can."

This is Bart Simpson praying when he is in danger of failing fourth grade and needs some extra time to study. It is just one example of the literally hundreds of time The Simpsons looks at religion and spirituality. Protestant, Catholic, Jew, Hindu (notably not Muslim for reasons explained in the book, but basically because no one on staff is Muslim and they therefore aren't sure how far they can push it): all get lampooned in this long-running series that is both very clever and very funny.

In its early days, The Simpsons got a lot of criticism for its subversive humour. It seemed that nothing was sacred and everything was there to be mocked. But you don't have to look far below the surface to see that a lot more than that is going on. Yes, nothing is safe from the show's potshots, but it is equally true that there's another deeper level at which much that is regarded as "good" by society is actually upheld even as it is being mocked.

This is a very entertaining book to read. This is because it examines a lot of episodes of The Simpsons and recalls many of the jokes. For me, it misses the opportunity to then transfer the underlying messages into "real life". Maybe that wasn't the author's purpose, but it seems to me that a lot could be made of, say, Bart's attitude to prayer that might help religious people examine their own attitudes. Instead, we just get to laugh a lot, which is no bad thing. I guess many readers with a religious inclination will draw their own conclusions rather than having them spelled out by the book.

Dale says

An interesting premise and lots of fun

Published by Westminster John Knox Press in 2001.

Google this book and you will find some criticism based on the fact that have entirely missed the point of the book. The point of ***The Gospel According to The Simpsons: The Spiritual Life of the World's Most***

Animated Family is NOT to tell how the Simpsons preach the Gospel. They don't.

However, not only is ***The Simpsons*** the best show on television, it is also a remarkably spiritual show. It is the only show in which the main characters go to church on a regular basis. No one thinks it strange that people pray. Prayers are answered. God exists and he acts. From time to time, organized religion is skewered with their wickedly clever satire. Then again, so is everything else, from rock stars to public education to family life to just about everything else. Pinsky's point is that religion is treated remarkably well on the show that has a bad reputation.

Pinsky focuses on...

Read more at: http://dwdsreviews.blogspot.com/2012/...

Ryan says

I came to this book as a huge Simpson's fan, looking for connections to religion that I may have over-looked in the years of watching I've put in. Instead I found long winded explanations of entire episodes and surface level connections. I grabbed this off the shelf of my library on a whim, and it looks like I may not be doing that again for a while...

Linda says

This book was an assigned read for my church's adult Sunday School Class. As much as I'm a huge fan of the show, this book (the part that I did read) did not hold my interest. There were also errors that I caught between the book and the TV show. I'll have to give the book a try another time. As much as the show does portray good family values and makes interesting points about religion, I guess I lost interest in the book because I enjoy and watch the show for it's entertainment value only.

Gabriel Conroy says

Quite good.

In part, this is a catalog of the Simpsons' references to religion. In part it's an analysis of those references. In part, it's an argument about popular culture's treatment of and interaction with religion.

The references to religion are many. As a fan of the show (although I haven't seen it much in recent years), I recognized quite a lot of the examples and was reminded of some I had forgotten.

The analysis is astute. For Pinsky, The Simpsons, as a whole, is respectful of religion, or at least religious sentiment, while it's distrustful of *organized* religion. I do disagree with Pinsky slightly on Ned Flanders, the show's stand-in for evangelical Christianity (or if not *evangelical* Christianity, then *very dedicated and robust* protestant Christianity). Pinsky seems to side with those who say the show's portrayal of the character and his family is (mostly) sympathetic and (mostly) positive to what Flanders represents. I see the portrayal as on-balance critical and mildly mean spirited. But there's a lot of room for cordial disagreement here!

Pinsky shows his work. I can see his point and any mean-spritedness that I, with my own history, see is significantly tempered by the ways in which the guy is portrayed positively. We're bargaining about price, is all, and Pinsky simply draws a different conclusion from mine.

The argument about popular culture's treatment of and interaction with religion is perhaps not as convincing as his analysis. Maybe "argument" is too strong and therefore unfair a word. Maybe "speculation" or "hypothesis" is fairer, as much of what he says on that score appears in his afterward, in which he analysis the critiques of religion said to be inspired by The Simpsons. The argument/speculation seems to be that The Simpsons opened the door to more (and more trenchant) critiques of religion--and to caustic critiques as well. I'm less convinced than he is that the critiques are all that new or all that more caustic. But I'm undecided on the matter. And Pinsky has earned the right to advance the speculation.

I'd recommend this book to any Simpsons fans, especially those interested in the show's treatment of religion.
