



Here I Stand: My Struggle for a Christianity of Integrity, Love, and Equality

John Shelby Spong

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The legendary Episcopal Bishop tells of his lifelong struggle to champion an authentic christianity based on love, not hatred.

Here I Stand: My Struggle for a Christianity of Integrity, Love, and Equality Details

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Walter says

Disclaimer: I'm a Spong fan and perhaps even a Spongian in my personal theology, so I am predisposed to like (almost) anything that the Bishop writes ... and this biography is no exception. It's an honest look at his life - far more candid than many I have read for such a public figure - and I found it to be a page-turner, especially those chapters that relate his experience as a bishop of the Episcopal Church. I have read many of his books and heard him speak many times, but I will admit to being surprised by the story of (and, in fairness, by) 'the man behind the bishop.'

It's vintage Spong: at turns heretical (but almost always with positive intent) and endearing. His theology (and the unapologetic and often purposefully provocative way in which it's shared) is often heretical to more conservative believers both within the Episcopal Church and outside of it, whereas his description of the pain of his hardscrabble upbringing is as palpably endearing as it is revelatory.

John Shelby Spong is a singular human being in every sense of the word. A son of the Segregated South, he has evolved into one of the most progressive voices in modern Christianity such that someone who was raised in and benefited from race- and gender-based exclusion ended up being a tireless champion of inclusion. His description of his distress at the health challenges of his first wife and his inability to figure out how to address them (and her) effectively before her death is surprisingly forthright. He acknowledges his personal faults and mistakes in a most candid and attractive way (but seems noticeably less self-critical with respect to the professional sphere of his life, which is a bit of a disappointment - he's a more humble and less righteous person than religious leader, which is an interesting [and more common] juxtaposition).

For example, he calls out the leaders whom he has known over the years, especially those who have disappointed him (and a few times too often in a less than charitable way). Yet his relating of his experience as a(n if not the) leading advocate for the full inclusion of women and gays and lesbians in the life of the church is both gripping and inspiring due to the evident and abundant Christian love and passion that undergird it. It's hard not to admire a man who has been so willing to advocate for those dispossessed and oppressed by an institution ostensibly dedicated to the example of its patron that is instead often depressingly repressive, regressive and dehumanizing.

I could go on, but won't. Suffice it to say that if you want to learn more about this fascinating spiritual leader, this biography will give you much insight. It will also inspire you, as the Bishop's fervent, inclusive advocacy is infectious: he continues to be at the forefront of evolving and expanding our understanding of and appreciative for the Divine. To get such a revealing look at the man behind the legacy is an authentically inspiring gift. Bishop Spong's willingness to engage the true mystery of faith has been a revelation to me and this biography has helped me to extend and enhance my appreciation for him as a person, too. Read it and be inspired.....

[Note: This biography was written to coincide with Bishop Spong's retirement from the Episcopal Church in 2000, so while it offers a wealth of insight and information, it does not cover his equally impressive contributions in retirement. In fact, some would say that his leadership (in his public speaking/educational efforts, in his writing and in his theology) after leaving the church is even more impactful. Let's hope that he chooses to update his biography and share the inside story of this rich period, too, at some point in the future.]

Shishir says

Meaning and origin of life

Life and Life Sciences examined with integrity (genetics and nurture)

Earth existence and formation explained well in Science

Luck and chance formed life (natural selection - evolution)

Life after death NOT essential

This life is enough!!

Older you get the better you are able to experience life

Fascinating to be alive

Live life fully wring every moment out of life.

This life is everything – do not sell people into looking forward to a better life afterlife

What comes after dying? (A somber subject! A denial)

Death is a natural part of life

You taste death when you lose your loved ones

(Bury a wife, father son ...)

Case and cause for Religion

Ultimate mystery - Death

Eternal Life – A new vision

Religion – telescopes looking for God outside

But look for God inwards

Footprints of eternity

Katherine says

Spong's autobiography is simultaneously a view of one man's spiritual journey and an insider's look at the culture wars that have gripped America's religious life over the last half century or so. I was drawn to this book because of Spong's other writing and came to appreciate more deeply the crucible in which those works were formed - as he suggests with his subtitle, the challenge of maintaining a church life without sacrificing one's sense of integrity, love and commitment to equality (which emerges more strongly from his honest portrayal of his own ignorance and prejudice).

Leo says

The best book I know of for any rational person grappling with how to resolve reason and faith, particularly of a Christian nature. Spong has been much maligned by many of his contemporaries, but that's because he pushes the limits of Christian thought. His ideas have made it possible for me to continue to believe--albeit in

a very different manner than the simplistic way I did as a child. He blends most of his theological insights with stories of his own life as a Christian coming to maturity in the segregated South. Those stories alone make this book worth reading.

Gwen says

Much less theology than I was expecting, honestly--I was hoping for more. (But I guess that's what the rest of Spong's books are for!) I could have done without the chapters after chapters on Episcopalian bureaucracy and inside baseball, although the bureaucracy aspect of Spong's work is critical to understanding how he didn't always fit in with the status quo. (But could we have trimmed the minutiae down a bit?)

While this book dipped too far and too often into self-aggrandizement, I was amazed that Spong recognized his white, male, and heterosexual privileges--it's not often that you see someone of his generation so aware of their privilege.

I wish, though, that Spong addressed doubt. Surely, in his decades of ministry, he experienced doubt and frustration about Christianity. (And if he didn't, I wish he would have addressed why and how that was possible.)

"Christianity ultimately provides no one with real security. Rather, it gives to me and others the capacity to embrace the radical insecurity of life as free, whole, and mature persons." (445)

Zac says

A friend of mine introduced me to this author who is also a Episcopal Bishop. It was interesting read; he has some very challenging ideas in the way we think of God, the Church and today's most pressing social issues. A good read for anyone praying that there is more to religion than just what we currently have.

Ellen Johnson says

Bishop James Spong is a very courageous man who loves the church but who does not believe we can keep asserting supernatural happenings in the Bible are true anymore, except as metaphor. This has lots of details about the church hierarchy that only Episcopal clergy would enjoy. I would highly recommend "Why Christianity Must Change or Die" for an intro to his thought. I enjoyed the frank discussions of civil rights era.

Craig says

This book is my favorite from Bishop Spong. He writes about his early life and life as an Episcopal priest. Thought as controversial Bishop Spong never sought about to be, but he's stance for racial justice, women rights and LGBT rights upset many even within his own church.

Mary says

Enjoyed learning about his childhood and young adulthood. Too much detail given about how he became a bishop which wasn't interesting to me. Read the first half of the book closely and skimmed the second half.

Len Knighton says

I have enjoyed Spong's columns for years but I found this book a bit dry and long.

Carly says

An interesting look at an American Episcopalian bishop's life, the US wing of Anglicanism. I have heard John Shelby Spong speaking and he is charismatic and impressive. I read 'Here I Stand' without having read any other of his books so I come to his autobiography either cold or fresh, depending on how you look at it.

The section dealing with Spong's southern childhood is lovely; his earnest, troubled existence is recorded with affection and some humour.

I was less enamoured of the larger part of the book dealing with Spong's adult life. It charts fascinating territory, from a liberal seminary, to priesthood at a delicate age, to a life of controversy as Bishop of Newark. Where Spong deals with his professional life he is generally engaging, detailing his development of a more and more inclusive Christianity over many years. His engagement with his parishioners is delightfully honest and adult. The sections on his personal life frustrated me, however, though he clearly attempts to deal with his first wife's mental illness with respect. He claims to regret some of his actions, or inactions, as a husband but the frankness he displays when discussing his childhood flags. His marriage is allocated a neat couple of paragraphs a chapter, and it is his professional triumphs that dominate. These are genuinely impressive, but I wanted more shadow, more doubt. A couple of decorous references to a bad temper remain unexplored. By the end of the book, his description of the courtship with his second wife is almost absent. The narrative travels from work colleagues to life partners in a uncomfortably hasty amount of time. If this was a whirlwind realisation of true love, fine, but I was left wanting.

To be fair, autobiography is not my favourite genre, so my standards may be unrealistic. In all, an interesting portrait of what seemed to me a partially examined life.

Frank Ogden says

A very detailed and long autobiography. One needs endurance to get through this lengthy personal history.

Willa Powell says

I read my fathers copy

Joe says

Bishop Spong is just plain awesome. He has been one of the leading voices in US Christianity for the full inclusion of LGBTQ individuals in the life of the church, against fundamentalism interpretations of the bible and, lately, for a total rethinking of Christianity away from theism. I didn't know much about his history, and this was a neat look at how he went from a young man in North Carolina to a radical bishop in Newark. I particularly enjoyed reading about how this theological thinking evolved, the way he sought to change the communities he worked in around various social issues, and his personal struggles and in his family. A great look at a great leader.

Dennis says

Kept attention 5

Well written 5

Must read 3

Important 3

Accessible 5
