











BOOKS

The Monitor's Guide to RELIGION BESTSELLERS

The Monitor's quarterly review of bestselling religion books offers an opportunity to survey the resurgent interest in religion and spirituality

HARDCOVER

- 1** **THE PURPOSE-DRIVEN LIFE**, by Rick Warren, Zondervan, \$19.99
 Pastor Warren thinks there is one thing wrong with self-help books: too much focus on the self. He's designed his book to put the focus back on God, a chapter a day, for 40 days. It's refreshing to put aside personal goals for a service- and community-based purpose, but Warren claims that God is putting us through a series of tests. The suggestion that God might take off for a while because all relationships need "space" is also disturbing. His God sounds surprisingly human and manipulative. (336 pp.)
By Kendra Nordin 
- 2** **WILD AT HEART**, by John Eldredge, Thomas Nelson, \$19.99
 Eldredge says God designed men to be dangerous, adventurous, and heroic. He rejects society's praise for the "nice guy," insisting that our emasculating culture forces men to deny their true nature, and he challenges men to live lives full of risk. At times, Eldredge seems to offer an excuse for recklessness, but ultimately he believes God alone gives men the answer to their true identity, and he points to the Bible to support his idea of masculinity. Many men (and women) will relate to his anecdotes, but readers shouldn't expect more than fleeting inspiration. (224 pp.) *By Christian Scriptor* 
- ✓ 3** **THE PASSION**, foreword by Mel Gibson, Icon Distribution, \$24.99
 For those who found it difficult to sit through the film's depiction of the crucifixion of Jesus, the still photographs in "The Passion" may bring some relief. They are so obviously snapshots of people on sets in costumes that even Jesus appears not as a sufferer but an actor in too much goopy red makeup. The random bursts of accompanying text - all Bible excerpts - are too short to add much value, and Mel Gibson's foreword, coupled with photographs of himself in messiah-like poses on set, only add to the book's self-congratulatory tone. (143 pp.) *By Elizabeth Armstrong* 
- ✓ 4** **THE DREAM GIVER**, by Bruce Wilkinson, Multnomah Publishers, \$16.99
 A guide for those seeking courage to pursue a dream. The first part is a simplistic allegory about a person named Ordinary who pushes beyond his comfort zone, wanders in a wasteland with faith as his guide, and transforms a desolate village into a beautiful city. The second part, drawing on biblical examples, serves as a "dream coach" with tangible steps. Wilkinson has useful experiences to share, having started several faith-based businesses, but some readers will complain that dreamers stay dreamers. The concept of waking to reality is not explored. (157 pp.) *By Kendra Nordin* 
- ✓ 5** **THE FAITH OF GEORGE BUSH**, by Stephen Mansfield, Tarcher, \$19.99
 This engaging narrative - from childhood to the present - reveals how President Bush came by the religious convictions that shape his life and his sense of a divine purpose for his presidency. While of greatest appeal to other believers, the sympathetic account is also valuable campaign literature, going beyond the familiar in depicting his character and approach to decisionmaking. But in confirming his strong sense of calling, moral focus, and relative lack of interest in reasoned debate on issues, it offers insights some readers may find unsettling. (224 pp.) *By Jane Lampman* 
- 6** **BEYOND BELIEF**, by Elaine Pagels, Random House, \$24.95
 Pagels draws on the more than 50 Christian writings discovered in Nag Hammadi, Egypt, to reveal a diversity of early teachings about Jesus. In her illuminating exploration of various works - including the Gospel of Mary Magdalene - Pagels raises the question of how different Christianity might have been had these works not been banned in the early centuries of church history. In a period when so many call themselves "seekers" and others press for a return to orthodoxy, this remarkable book will stir and provoke thought. (256 pp.) (Full review May 15, 2003) *By Jane Lampman* 
- ✓ 7** **THE LORD IS MY SHEPHERD**, by Harold Kushner, Knopf, \$19.95
 Rabbi Harold Kushner, a bestselling author, asks, "Can 15 lines from a single page of the Bible change your life?" His small volume responds affirmatively with an interpretive chapter for each verse of the 23rd Psalm. Kushner is an optimist and at times surprisingly secular: "He restores my soul," for instance, indicates that a person is "free to do those things that identify us as human." Kushner's rendering is one of balance and individual choice in the constant supportive presence of God. A comforting, readable book to keep on the shelf. (192 pp.) *By Tonya Miller* 
- ✓ 8** **A YEAR WITH C.S. LEWIS**, by C.S. Lewis, HarperSanFrancisco, \$19.95
 This collection of excerpts from the writings of C.S. Lewis offers more to contemplate than the pithy one-liners of most thought-for-today books. Drawn from his extensive commentaries on Christianity, the selections cover topics such as pride, humility, individuality, and traditional Anglican theology. Readers familiar with Lewis's writings will appreciate the reminders of his perspective. Those who know him only for his "Chronicles of Narnia" stories will discover the spiritual perspective of the author, but may find the items fragmentary. (410 pp.) *By Ruth Johnstone Wales* 
- ✓ 9** **THE TROUBLE WITH ISLAM**, by Irshad Manji, St. Martin's Press, \$22.95
 Written by an outspoken Canadian TV personality as a letter to fellow Muslims, this deliberately provocative call for reform has stirred considerable controversy. Manji, a lesbian whose Pakistani family emigrated from Uganda, has a penchant for bold questions, aiming to shake the faith out of medieval strictures into using Western freedom to update itself. She targets the key issues facing Islam, but her exuberant missive shows a thin grasp of history and often seems more geared to personal catharsis than to winning over her audience. (240 pp.) *By Jane Lampman* 
- ✓ 10** **WAKING THE DEAD**, by John Eldredge, Thomas Nelson, \$21.99
 Eldredge, a leader of the Christian men's movement, believes each Christian is fighting an all-out war against the forces of evil, although he offers little in the way of practical armor. A warrior needs to walk with God, listen to God's detailed instructions, and let God heal his heart, while ignoring the spiritual emptiness of most church life. Eldredge illustrates his argument with quotations from sources such as "The Lord of the Rings," "The Matrix," and "The Chronicles of Narnia," but ignores Christianity's rich literature of spiritual practices. (288 pp.) *By Joel Abrams* 



Available on tape



New review

• Book ranking courtesy of Publishers Weekly, March 2004