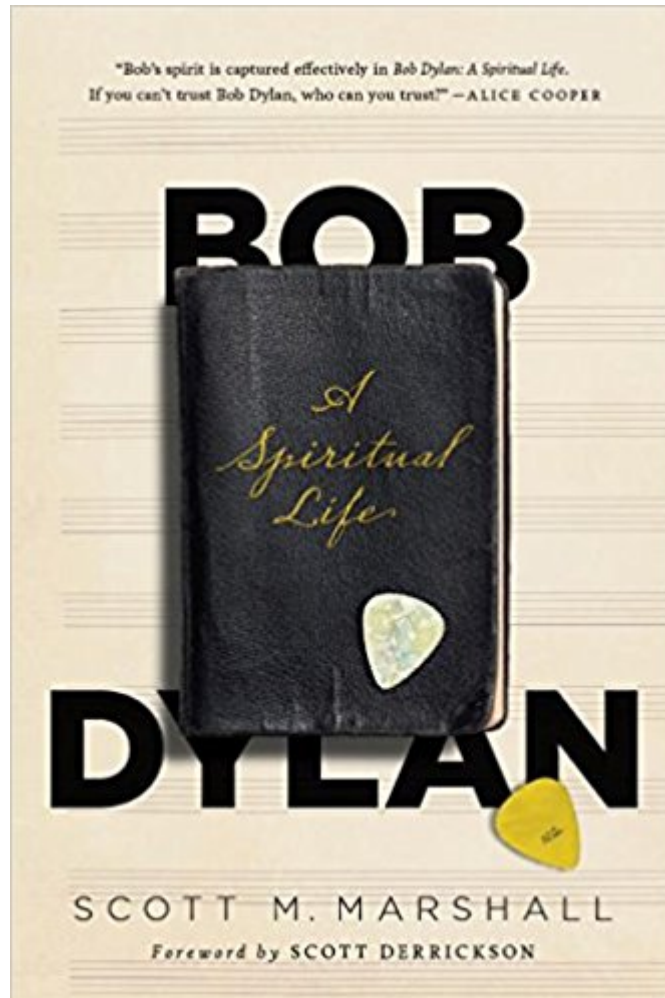




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Bob Dylan: A Spiritual Life



Synopsis

Never before has a book like this one delved into the spiritual odyssey of cultural icon Bob Dylan. Tracking an American original--from his Jewish roots to his controversial embrace of Jesus to his enduring legacy as the composer of the *Tempest* album--*Bob Dylan: A Spiritual Life* delivers the story of a man in dogged pursuit of redemption. Based on years of research and original interviews, this book sorts through the myths and misunderstandings and reveals Dylan to be both traditional and radical in the way he expresses his spiritual quest for purpose and meaning. Call Dylan whatever you want, but the name won't stick, said foreword writer and film director Scott Derrickson. What does stick is his music, in part because his songs contain a deep, abiding spirituality that moves listeners like me more than the songs of any other artist. *Bob Dylan: A Spiritual Life* bridges the gap between purpose and meaning in grand fashion. It offers readers an informative, entertaining, and nuanced look into Bob Dylan's spiritual odyssey. Today, there is not a Dylan book in existence that exclusively focuses on his spiritual odyssey through years of research and interviews.

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Customer Reviews

Bob Dylan has been an inspiration to me throughout my career and I've been deeply affected by his spiritual journey. Rock and roll is at its best when it asks the important questions, as Bob has always done in his work, and there is no more important question than the question of God. *Bob Dylan: A Spiritual Life* provides the final answer to those who doubt or minimize Bob's spiritual commitment.

His faith remains solid. He is the prophet of our generation and we ignore his warnings about a slow train coming at our own peril. --Gary Cherone, lead singer, Extreme, Van Halen

A pointillist rendering of a man's spiritual evolution ... cross-referencing over five decades of interviews and friendships, distilled from hundreds of artistic, religious and personal sources, *Bob Dylan: A Spiritual Life* succeeds mightily in documenting Bobby Dylan Zimmerman's continuing (and often misunderstood) personal reconciliation of two faiths. --Noel Paul Stookey of Peter, Paul and Mary

Scott Marshall has performed the important task of bringing light to the mystery of how the man who warned us not to follow leaders lectured us fifteen years later that we had to serve somebody, since he talked to just about everybody who had insight into Dylan's thinking at the time of his famous *Slow Train Coming* run at San Francisco's Warfield Theatre. Painstaking footnotes manifest the level of dedication to research. --Jack McDonough, former Billboard correspondent and author of *San Francisco Rock: The Illustrated History, 1965-1985*

Well researched and energetically argued, a challenging new view of a complicated man.

•Eric Alterman, award-winning author and columnist at *The Nation* Bob Dylan is a Jew and a Christian and a steadfast contrarian. Scott Marshall provides a balanced, comprehensive account of the Nobel Prize winner's spiritual life

•a mysterious journey of Biblical proportions.

•Don Lattin, longtime religion writer at the *San Francisco Chronicle* and the author of *Changing Our Minds* Mr. Marshall skillfully weaves his tale with relevant quotes as Dylan travels from seeing the Bible as "just literature" to believing "in the Bible, literally."

•Andrew Muir, author of *One More Night: Bob Dylan's Never Ending Tour* and *Shakespeare in Cambridge: A Celebration of the Shakespeare Festival* Wow, Oh my, and Thank You are the words that kept coming to mind as I read Scott Marshall's masterly *Bob Dylan: A Spiritual Life*. Wow for the extent of research, which is top-notch; Oh my for the scores of facts and anecdotes I'd never run across before (and I've been reading Dylan bios for decades!); and Thank You for what is probably the best-argued book on the enduring biblical pulse at the heart of Dylan's music. As the author himself says, "Why bet against Dylan having a place at that heavenly welcome table?"

•Wow, Oh my, and Thank You, Scott Marshall!

•Robert Hudson, editor, Zondervan; author, *The Christian Writer's Manual of Style* and *Kiss the Earth When You Pray* Scott Marshall comes as close as anyone ever will to documenting the complete and complex record of Bob Dylan's continuing spiritual journey.

•Jeffrey Gaskill, producer, *Gotta Serve Somebody: The Gospel Songs of Bob Dylan* *Bob Dylan: A Spiritual Life* contributes significantly to

our understanding of the enigmatic Nobel laureate. —•Randall Balmer, Emmy Award nominee;
Dartmouth College

Interesting book but too much detail. The author starts with the premise "Bob Dylan is really still a Christian", and then goes about trying to prove his assertion circumstantially, by recounting every play-list from every concert Dylan has performed over the past 30 years and by reading nuanced interpretation into every interview. Dylan is, and always has been an enigma. I believe his conversion to Christianity was real. I think it would be really hard to be him and to remain a fervent believer without Christian community around him.

I certainly appreciate Bob Dylan's songwriting, but I think I admire his patented patience most of all. The public and the Pharisees and the Medianites try to grab him like a fish, but he always gets away! Mr. Dylan's journey is one of observer and truth seeker, with a background set in religious tradition that gives God His rightful due. The book is insightful, somewhat duplicitous, and yet you do come to an understanding, that unless you and Mr. Dylan share a common perception of God's intentions and game plan, you will only agree to disagree. After all, truth is not confined within our perceptions or separate realities. Truth, like understanding the Divinity of The Trinity, takes a giant step back in observation and then comes the revelation. It's a good book!

The first thing I immediately noticed was the thoroughness of Scott Marshall's evaluation of this topic. No stone is left unturned. No period of Bob Dylan's life is left unexamined. It does not just regurgitate the same old accounts that have appeared in dozens of books on Dylan. Marshall has relentlessly conducted his own interviews, many concerning the time of Dylan's conversion. His research is thorough and impeccable. It's like reading Clinton Heylin, minus the condescension. As you would expect the book covers the 3 significant chapters of Dylan's spiritual life - prior to his Christian conversion, during the time of the gospel trilogy / tours, and the remainder of his life after the fervor of those couple years. I didn't learn much new concerning the 1st part but the author details the not insignificant amount of biblical references in Bob's work prior to *Slow Train Coming*. The 2nd part concerning the time of Dylan's new-found faith is extremely interesting. There are some new sources that he has accessed. Even after reading well over 50 books on Dylan I found myself appreciating some things about this period that I never did before. There was an incredible bravery on Bob's part to do what he did. It is one thing to make a well produced sounding album like *Slow Train Coming* and surprise everyone. But it is another thing to double-down by

doing a tour and not play one single old song. To ignore 15 years of songwriting brilliance and play 2 hour shows and only sing songs about Jesus. I would imagine that his old friends hate it, much of his audience hates it, his record label hates it, his Jewish family certainly hates it. Then to triple-down (I know that's not really a word) by releasing an even more Christian album with *Saved*. Add insult to injury by adding an album cover that shows the saving Blood of the Lamb flowing down to mankind. Bob Dylan had to have been seriously touched by God to do all of that. When has that ever happened before to anyone of like stature in the music world? He makes U2 look like dabblers in the faith. We've all read about the period of Dylan's career but for the first time, when reading this book, I get the sense of how outrageous this was. The sense of isolation that Bob must have felt after setting himself to this path and the undeniable devotion that caused him to be this extreme. After the gospel tours and the 3 Christian albums Dylan's fervor waned. The tours with exclusively Christian songs are over. The Biblical references on the albums, while still there, are less often and more subtle. The thinking of many people is that Dylan has renounced Christianity and went back to Judaism, that this was just a horrible detour in his life and, thank God (or whoever), that it is over. This is another place where this book is invaluable as Marshall presents stacks of evidence that goes against this viewpoint. I won't list all of it but here are some things that struck me.

1. Dylan never comes close to renouncing or distancing himself from Christianity in any way. Ever since his conversion he has stated that Jesus was the only way to God. Never in an interview has he endorsed a more inclusive philosophy; and he has had plenty of opportunities.
2. Look at the setlists. Over the next decades he continues to occasionally drop in songs that are extremely clear in their profession of faith - songs like *Gotta Serve Somebody*, *In The Garden* and *I Believe in you*. If you are backing off on your belief in the Jesus is the only way theology wouldn't you stop singing songs with such clear dividing lines? If you're not fully persuaded simply let them fall by the wayside and don't sing them any more. Bob has also augmented this shows over the years with quite a few traditional Christian hymns and Gospel songs that are not ambiguous in any way.
3. *In The Garden* - Bob really likes this song. He had an HBO special of an Australian show in the mid 80's that opens with this song. Bob eloquently has a spoken word introduction saying how it is a song about his hero. Not an accident. Later in the 80's Amnesty International used *I Shall Be Released* as a closing anthem for their star studded concerts. Bob suggests next time they do this they use another one of his songs - *In The Garden*. He suggests it at least 3 times! When recently asked what songs of his have not received the attention they deserve he answered *Brownsville Girl* and *In The Garden*. Feel free to read the lyrics again if you have forgotten just what Dylan says in the song.
4. *Israel* - Bob has played in Israel a few times. Bob - out of a sense of political correctness

and sensitivity wouldn't it be a good idea if you laid off the specifically hardcore Christian songs? Just so no one would get the wrong idea, ok? I mean, you're pretty much done with the Christian thing and are back to Judaism, right? Apparently not. Every time Bob plays Israel he plays something like Gotta Serve Somebody or Gonna Change My Way Of Thinking or, you guessed it, In The Garden. Maybe it's just a coincidence and he thought he was in New Jersey. Marshall extensively discusses Dylan's relationship with Judaism, detailing visits to synagogues and the like. Bob Dylan certainly has not cut ties with his heritage, but the author illuminates how this is not at all in contradiction to his Christian faith. Bible believing Christians well understand that the 2 are forever linked. Two thirds of the Christian Bible is the Jewish scriptures. The vast majority of the New Testament was written by Jews. Dylan quotes from Jeremiah 31 in the Old Testament on the inside sleeve of Saved which speaks of the New Covenant that God will make with the house of Israel. Dylan's behavior as a believing Jew is not unusual. As a Christian I don't look at Dylan as an example. He is far from someone who's behavior is worthy of imitating. But he is arguably the most creative and innovative singer songwriter of the last half century. The word Genius is not an exaggeration. I would imagine, with the possible exception of The Beatles, that there are more books of analysis written about Dylan than any other artist. If one wants to not only know his history but actually come to understand him (if such a thing is possible) I think that this book is essential to that understanding. On "Masters Of War" Dylan originally wrote that "Jesus would never forgive what you do". After his conversion Bob never sang those words again in concert. Apparently he knows from experience just how much Jesus can and will forgive.

Highly recommend... The book explores Bob Dylan's spiritual growth in his life and music. I had not known before about the positive impact Rev. Billy Graham had on his life. Dylan's knowledge of the Old and New Testaments have guided him in writing many of his songs.

Knowing of and respectful of many of Dylan's spiritual allusions, I was awed by the breadth of his Judeo-Christian imagery spanning his entire career. Following this reading pilgrimage accompanied by the soundtrack of a lifetime was a profound experience.

I really liked this "Spiritual biography" of Dylan. Leaves many questions unanswered but does show Dylan's spiritual side. I was particularly struck that since Dylan announced his "conversion" he has never used the phrase "even Jesus could not forgive" in his classic Masters of War.

Having read Marshall' s "Restless Pilgrim" 15 years ago I found this latest book more complete and just as convincing. Having listened to DYLAN since 1963 I find his lyrics to be the key to who he is and what he believes. I also appreciated some interesting music references the author provided.

I thoroughly enjoyed reading this book about the spiritual elements in Bob's song from the beginning of his career. As a Christian, I was especially interested in the material from his conversion and on. Marshall has done an impressive job in finding so many comments from both Bob and his contemporaries.

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