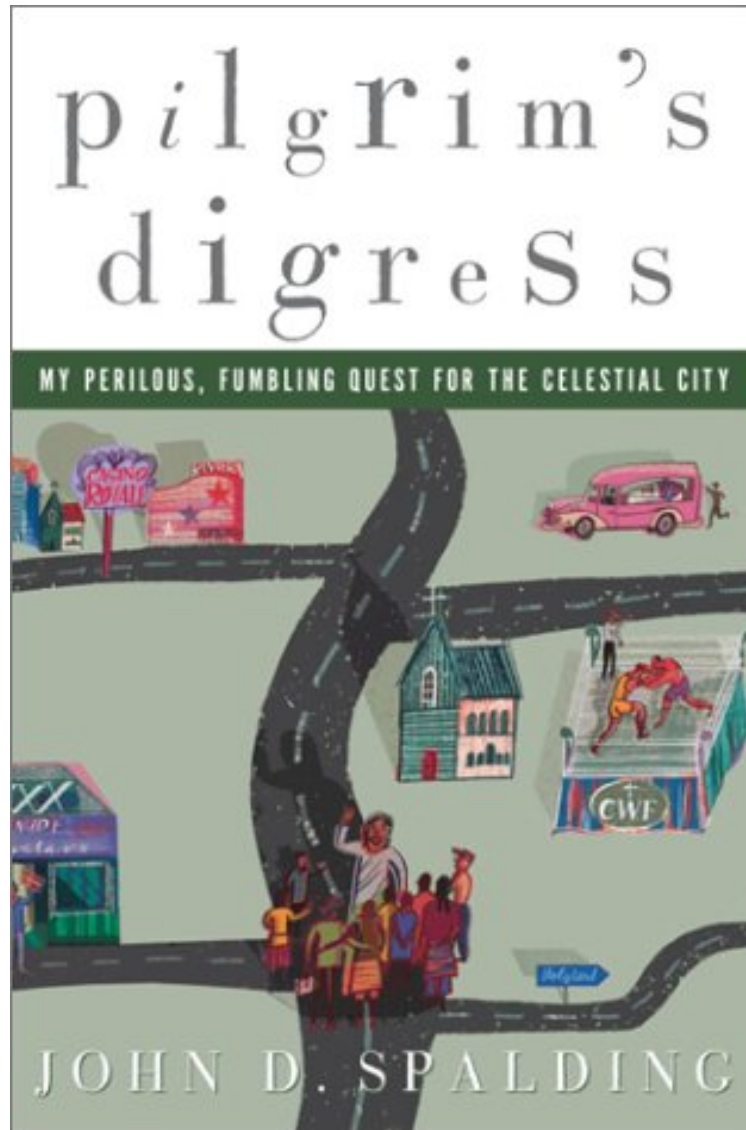


(Download) A Pilgrim's Digress: My Perilous, Fumbling Quest for the Celestial City

# A Pilgrim's Digress: My Perilous, Fumbling Quest for the Celestial City

*John Spalding*

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**John Spalding : A Pilgrim's Digress: My Perilous, Fumbling Quest for the Celestial City** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised A Pilgrim's Digress: My Perilous, Fumbling Quest for the Celestial City:

4 of 4 people found the following review helpful. Sometimes it takes someone from the outside looking in...By Tom HinkleJohn D. Spalding, lapsed Protestant, brings us this humorous collection of observations and encounters with

offbeat expressions of religious fervor. It's formatted loosely on the structure of "Pilgrim's Progress", but the parallels are really unnecessary, as this book stands on its own as a collection of observant essays. Whether preaching on a New York City streetcorner or making an arduous pilgrimmage in Europe, Spalding gets personally involved in every quirky journey. I had to give it less than five stars, however, because one section of the book, "A Pilgrim's Dreams", which starts off with a chapter about God as a football fan that an eighth-grader could have written, is just Spalding trying to be funny on his own, and, to me, it just doesn't work. It's his observations that hit the target. A good read for a rainy afternoon. 1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Biting, flippant, and right on target! By Charles Wyatt Spalding holds a mirror up to American culture, particularly American \*spiritual\* culture, and shows us something quite peculiar! In the "Celestial City," we find Spalding on a Midwest excursion to elucidate an American obsession with spiritual expression -- all 113 tons of it! On the other side of the Atlantic, Spalding discovers the shocking truth about John Wesley and his health "methods." Whether it is riding around in a coffin stashed in a pink hearse, or doing the bidding of a popular theologian who rants about the pope's "mania for virginity," Spalding keeps the reader's interest much more than piqued! And, much more than sardonic laughter (though there is plenty of that!), the reader also must explore the truth of the matter \*with\* Spalding and ask, "Really!?" Pick it up, it's a great read! 1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Thought-provoking and laugh-out-loud funny By A Customer A brilliant interweaving of the sublime and the ridiculous that highlights the amazing (sometimes disturbing) varieties of religion in America. The people John Spalding writes about may have peculiar faith practices, but Spalding lets you see beyond the strangeness to the humanity, and even the validity, of their perspectives. He lets his subjects speak for themselves, adds some historical background to give grounding, and suffuses it all with his unique sense of humor. I must say I chuckled my way through the essay about the man who drilled a hole in his head to relieve stress, but by the end I was thinking there might be something to his approach!

It's a long, strange journey to paradise, and often hilarious one, if you bravely follow the road less traveled—wherever it leads. John D. Spalding certainly has. In this smart and insightful collection, Spalding, Beliefnet.com's popular offbeat humorist, wanders America as a modern-day "pilgrim" seeking the Celestial City. Loosely organizing his comic misadventures according to John Bunyan's classic *The Pilgrim's Progress*, Spalding describes how he spent three days as a street preacher in Times Square ("Excuse me, sir, did you know you're going to hell?"); went to the mat (conversationally) with Omega and Apocalypse, two mainstays of the Christian Wrestling Federation; and visited a man who, practicing the art of trepanation, drilled a hole in his head to make himself permanently happy. He also experienced his own funeral, courtesy of the Dying-to-Get-In Company. Like Christian, Bunyan's beleaguered pilgrim, Spalding never knows who is waiting around the next bend. On his journey, he finds himself at the mercy of rebirthing therapists, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Mormon missionaries, and in the company of a psychic "ghost counselor," America's luckiest (and perhaps divinely blessed) lottery winner, and a mysterious, barefoot holy man named Whatsyourname. Finally, he makes an ancient, five-hundred-mile pilgrimmage across Spain, during which he learns what it truly means to be a pilgrim. Funny, wry, and revealing, the stories in *A Pilgrim's Digress* describe Spalding's satirical quest for the righteous path and what he discovers about the spiritual zeitgeist along the way.

From Publishers Weekly The tradition of satirizing the manners and morals of America's faithful is a long and mostly honorable one, as deeply rooted as religious practice itself in this still God-fearing nation. But in this series of vignettes by a "lapsed Protestant" and Internet humorist, it is often unclear whether he is fully committed to the role of rueful bystander he has assumed. An admiring profile of a chaplain in Las Vegas jostles a rather patronizing account of a visit to the Christian Booksellers Association convention, where the music company videos "basically spin the same simple message about sin and salvation." Blessed with apparently unlimited financial resources and a pleasantly blank Day-Timer, this gifted loose cannon experiences and narrates the pleasures of the Berkshires' Canyon Ranch spa, and reveals the wonders of a homegrown Garden of Eden in Lucas, Kansas. Given the paucity of explorer-adventurers in our overscheduled era, it is also truly wonderful that someone (else) has 36 days to make a pilgrimmage to Santiago de Compostela and report back. Yet after a while, the changes of scene and subject become jarring, the insights a little less than profound. If Spalding had started his pilgrimmage with something more than skepticism and an incisive pen, it would have given this erratically entertaining book the consistency and form that ultimately evade it. Copyright 2003 Reed Business Information, Inc. From Booklist A former Harvard divinity student and current author of the "Sick Soul" humor column for Beliefnet.com. takes a modern-day crack at John Bunyan's classic morality fable, *The Pilgrim's Progress*. Borrowing chapter headings from places that Bunyan's earnest pilgrim visited on his famed spiritual quest, Spalding takes the reader on a true-life odyssey through the Slough of Despond, Vanity Fair, the Valley of Humiliation, and the Celestial City. Determined to take a humorous peek at some of the more curious and quirky belief systems that sustain people all across the nation, he interviews a casino chaplain, spends some quality time with members of the Christian Wrestling Foundation, poses as a street preacher in Times Square, enjoys the multiple benefits of his own faux funeral, luxuriates at a New Age spa, and undertakes a grueling 500-mile trek on a traditional pilgrimmage route. The result is a hilarious crazy quilt of often eccentric, mostly sincere spiritual quests and

philosophies. Margaret Flanagan Copyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved “An insouciant collection . . . Spalding writes in the great theological tradition of Hunter S. Thompson, Woody Allen, and P. J. O’Rourke.” —John Wilson, *Christianity Today* “John Spalding’s brisk tour of *Vanity Fair* shows that idolatry is as fashionable today as it ever was. Readers who take their Christianity seriously will find hope in his unsparing, hilarious iconoclasm.” —James Wilcox, author of *Modern Baptists* “Armed with a marvelously irreverent sense of humor, John Spalding explores the public and private faces of religion. In episode after episode on his journey, he punctures pomposity with illuminating shafts of light while raising to consciousness the very reality that religion so often exists to hide. I smiled constantly as I read this book. Healthy people will love it, while others will discover that being able to laugh at oneself is not generally a virtue of the deeply pious.” —John Shelby Spong, author of *A New Christianity for a New World* “Many through history have unintentionally made religion hilarious. John Spalding does it deliberately and does it very well. His book will appeal to anyone who truly believes—in having a good laugh.” —Gregg Easterbrook, author of *The Here and the Now*