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The Faith of the Outsider

Exclusion and Inclusion in the Biblical Story

FRANK ANTHONY SPINA

The Bible is quintessentially about "insiders" — Israel as the chosen people and Jesus as the savior of a divinely elected people. Yet the ideas of election and exclusivity are under attack today. What could be more scandalous in a time when inclusivity has become a dominant cultural value?

In this book Frank Anthony Spina explores the Bible's abiding insider/outsider motif, showing that God's exclusive election actually has an inclusive purpose. Spina's careful look at the biblical narrative highlights in bold relief the remarkable number of stories that treat nonelect people positively and, even more, as strategically important participants in God's redemptive plan.

The Faith of the Outsider features stories of outsiders who, whether wittingly or unwittingly, actually promote God's agenda and who sometimes become insiders themselves under the most amazing circumstances. There are also stories in which outsiders are

favorably contrasted to insiders who behave like or become outsiders themselves.

In addition to providing fresh insight into the ultimate purposes of God, the outsiders appearing in these stories — Esau, Tamar, Rahab, Naaman, pagan sailors and Assyrian citizens, Ruth, and the woman at the well — act in ways that require a reassessment of the Bible's election theology. Spina argues that God chooses Israel not for its own sake but for the blessing of the entire world. Likewise, Jesus is presented in universal terms, as the vehicle for the reconciliation of all.

Successfully presented as talks to church and lay audiences, the stories gathered here are at once instructive and enjoyable to read. Spina's work illustrates just how much can be learned from the biblical narrative itself as opposed to abstract theological reflection. More than anything else, these inspiring stories underscore the radical character of the Bible's gracious and sovereign God.

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