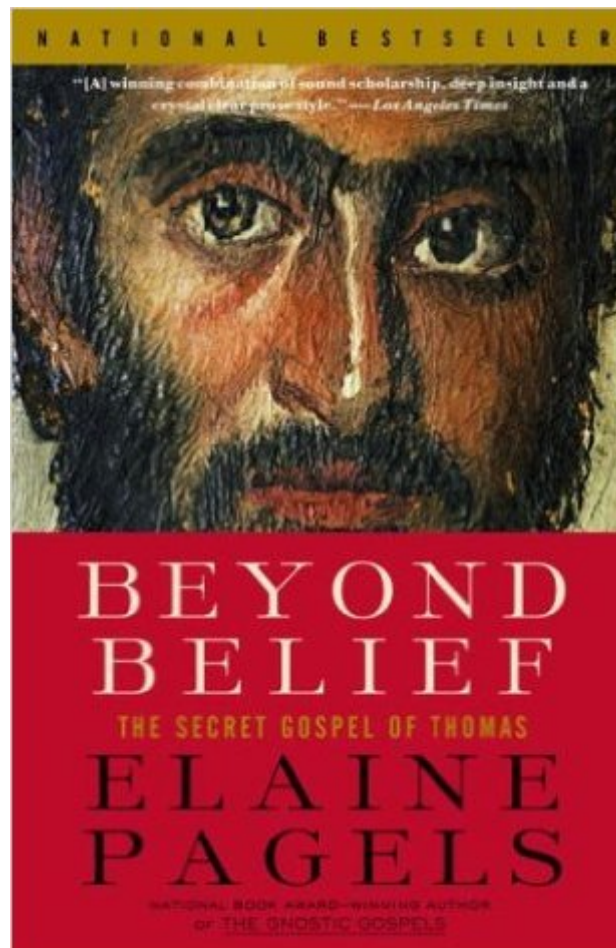


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Beyond Belief: The Secret Gospel Of Thomas



Synopsis

In *Beyond Belief*, renowned religion scholar Elaine Pagels continues her groundbreaking examination of the earliest Christian texts, arguing for an ongoing assessment of faith and a questioning of religious orthodoxy. Spurred on by personal tragedy and new scholarship from an international group of researchers, Pagels returns to her investigation of the *Secret Gospel of Thomas*, and breathes new life into writings once thought heretical. As she arrives at an ever-deeper conviction in her own faith, Pagels reveals how faith allows for a diversity of interpretations, and that the *heretical* voices of Christianity encourage and sustain *the* recognition of the light within us all.

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Customer Reviews

Elaine Pagels is not a minister and not a theologian. She is an historian of religion at Princeton, whose *oeuvre* since grad school at Harvard has been the "gnostic gospels," in particular the cache of texts and fragments found in a jar in Nag Hamadi Egypt in 1945. The jar had been buried somewhere around 360 A.D., most likely to preserve for the future a body of works that had been banned as heretical by the then-emergent orthodox Christian Church. Needless to say, defenders of orthodoxy have been less than thrilled by the prospect of having to defend themselves against what they must have believed was, quite literally, a dead letter. The sharp tones of offended orthodoxy are evident in many of the reviews of this book found on this site, but that's really their problem, not Pagels's. If you are seeking after a glimmer and a hint of an alternative Christian path, an alternative

to what Catholicism and its spin-offs offer, this might be a good place to start. As an historian, Pagels takes a bold and risky step when she begins her book with a personal narrative of a parent's anguish at the prospective death of a child. It was this anxiety and anguish that led her into a church not as an academic analyst, but a customer, as it were. Still, she could not suspend her scholarly curiosity as the process of a faith reaffirmed unfolded. Some reviewers have made the outrageous charge that Pagels is anti-Christian. Having just put down the book, I find this charge ludicrous. It would be true only if "Christian" is defined as someone who accepts without question a particular interpretation of a particular text with no possibility of there being anything else ever.

Elaine Pagels is an exceptionally engaging writer with a talent for locating and explaining hidden wisdom. She wrote an earlier book, "The Gnostic Gospels: A New Account of the Origins of Christianity," that brilliantly summarized the ancient and rambling Nag Hammadi texts, which describe the teachings of Jesus as captured by early Christian writers. In "Beyond Belief," a title that addresses the audience she wishes to reach, Pagels examines more closely these ancient texts and how they compare to the four gospels. She focuses on the "Gospel of Thomas" (90 ce) comparing it to the Gospel of John (100 ce) and current Christian beliefs about the teachings of Jesus. "Beyond Belief" is intensely interesting to the right audience. It is part gospel analysis, which she translates from ancient Greek, part early Christian history and part personal story meant to provide context in understanding the beauty of modern Christianity. One audience for this book is those seeking to understand factually what Jesus taught and what happened to Christianity in the early centuries following his death (30 ce) and how the Gospel of Thomas can shed light on that understanding. But another audience, the one for whom this book will resonate most deeply, are readers with an intuitive grasp of "transcendence" and the teachings of Jesus that verify the union that can be experienced between God and man. This is what Saint John of the Cross referred to when he wrote "All and Nothing." ("Here I stand alone transcending all knowledge"). Pagels points out that this experience is taught by Jesus in the Gospel of Thomas and expressed in the Vedic literature of India. ("I am That"). It is found in the writings from many religious traditions.

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