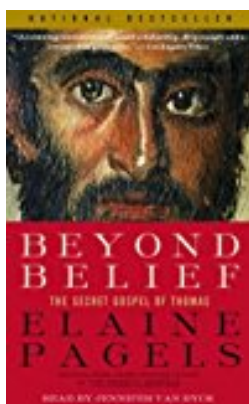


[PDF] Beyond Belief: The Secret Gospel Of Thomas

Elaine Pagels, Jennifer Van Dyck - pdf download free book



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Description:

Shortly after Elaine Pagels's two-and-half-year-old son was diagnosed with a rare lung disease, the religion professor found herself drawn to a Christian church again for the first time in many years. In *Beyond Belief: The Secret Gospel of Thomas* Pagels, best know for her National Book Award-winning *The Gnostic Gospels*, wrestles with her own faith as she struggles to understand when--and why--Christianity became associated almost exclusively with the ideas codified in the fourth-century Nicene Creed and in the canonical texts of the New Testament. In her exploration, she uncovers the

richness and diversity of Christian philosophy that has only become available since the discovery of the Nag Hammadi texts.

At the center of *Beyond Belief* is what Pagels identifies as a textual battle between The Gospel of Thomas (rediscovered in Egypt in 1945) and The Gospel of John. While these gospels have many superficial similarities, Pagels demonstrates that John, unlike Thomas, declares that Jesus is equivalent to "God the Father" as identified in the Old Testament. Thomas, in contrast, shares with other supposed secret teachings a belief that Jesus is not God but, rather, is a teacher who seeks to uncover the divine light in all human beings. Pagels then shows how the Gospel of John was used by Bishop Irenaeus of Lyon and others to define orthodoxy during the second and third centuries. The secret teachings were literally driven underground, disappearing until the Twentieth Century. As Pagels argues this process "not only impoverished the churches that remained but also impoverished those [Irenaeus] expelled."

Beyond Belief offers a profound framework with which to examine Christian history and contemporary Christian faith, and Pagels renders her scholarship in a highly readable narrative. The one deficiency in Pagels' examination of Thomas, if there is one, is that she never fully returns in the end to her own struggles with religion that so poignantly open the book. How has the mysticism of the Gnostic Gospels affected her? While she hints that she and others have found new pathways to faith through Thomas, the impact of Pagels' work on contemporary Christianity may not be understood for years to come. --Patrick O'Kelley --This text refers to the edition.

From Publishers Weekly In this majestic new book, Pagels (*The Gnostic Gospels*) ranges panoramically over the history of early Christianity, demonstrating the religion's initial tremendous diversity and its narrowing to include only certain texts supporting certain beliefs. At the center of her book is the conflict between the gospels of John and Thomas. Reading these gospels closely, she shows that Thomas offered readers a message of spiritual enlightenment. Rather than promoting Jesus as the only light of the world, Thomas taught individuals that "there is a light within each person, and it lights up the whole universe. If it does not shine, there is darkness." As she eloquently and provocatively argues, the author of John wrote his gospel as a refutation of Thomas, portraying the disciple Thomas as a fool when he doubts Jesus, and Jesus as the only true light of the world. Pagels goes on to demonstrate that the early Christian writer Irenaeus promoted John as the true gospel while he excluded Thomas, and a host of other early gospels, from the list of those texts that he considered authoritative. His list became the basis for the New Testament canon when it was fixed in 357. Pagels suggests that we recover Thomas as a way of embracing the glorious diversity of religious tradition. As she elegantly contends, religion is not merely an assent to a set of beliefs, but a rich, multifaceted fabric of teachings and experiences that connect us with the divine. Exhilarating reading, Pagels's book offers a model of careful and thoughtful scholarship in the lively and exciting prose of a good mystery writer.

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