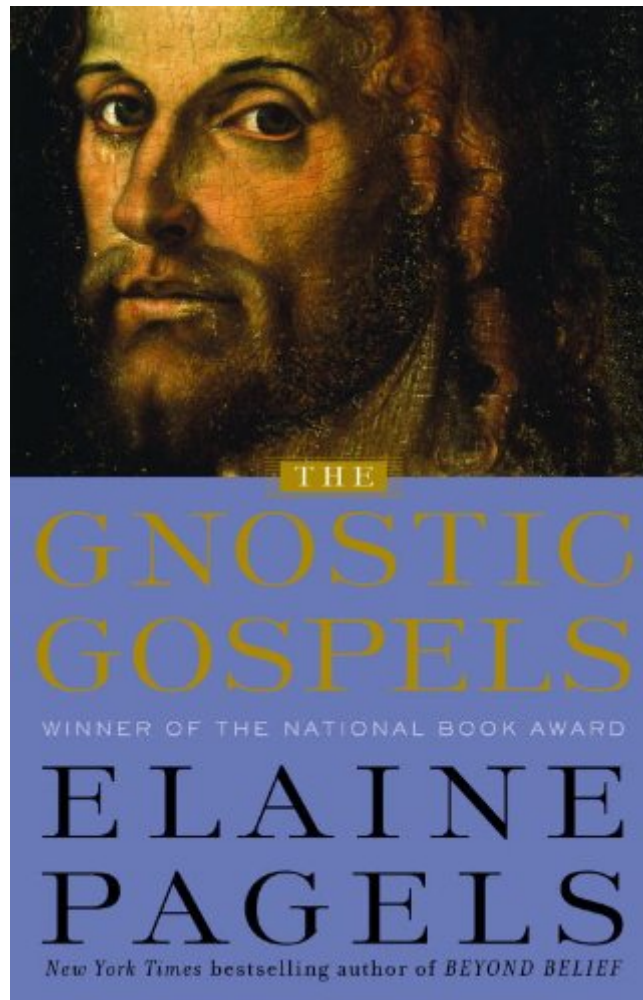


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The Gnostic Gospels (Modern Library 100 Best Nonfiction Books)



Synopsis

Selected by the Modern Library as one of the 100 best nonfiction books of all time, *The Gnostic Gospels* is a landmark study of the long-buried roots of Christianity, a work of luminous scholarship and wide popular appeal. First published in 1979 to critical acclaim, winning the National Book Award and the National Book Critics Circle Award, *The Gnostic Gospels* has continued to grow in reputation and influence over the past two decades. It is now widely recognized as one of the most brilliant and accessible histories of early Christian spirituality published in our time. In 1945 an Egyptian peasant unearthed what proved to be the Gnostic Gospels, thirteen papyrus volumes that expounded a radically different view of the life and teachings of Jesus Christ from that of the New Testament. In this spellbinding book, renowned religious scholar Elaine Pagels elucidates the mysteries and meanings of these sacred texts both in the world of the first Christians and in the context of Christianity today. With insight and passion, Pagels explores a remarkable range of recently discovered gospels, including the Gospel of Thomas and the Gospel of Mary Magdalene, to show how a variety of "Christianities" emerged at a time of extraordinary spiritual upheaval. Some Christians questioned the need for clergy and church doctrine, and taught that the divine could be discovered through spiritual search. Many others, like Buddhists and Hindus, sought enlightenment "and access to God" within. Such explorations raised questions: Was the resurrection to be understood symbolically and not literally? Was God to be envisioned only in masculine form, or feminine as well? Was martyrdom a necessary "or worthy" expression of faith? These early Christians dared to ask questions that orthodox Christians later suppressed "and their explorations led to profoundly different visions of Jesus and his message. Brilliant, provocative, and stunning in its implications, *The Gnostic Gospels* is a radical, eloquent reconsideration of the origins of the Christian faith.

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Customer Reviews

I read this years ago right after graduating from high school. This book was a life changer for me. I was heavily indoctrinated in the Catholic church and felt that by even reading this book and daring to speculate about its contents that the church roof would fall in on my head the next time I went to church. Although it was close to heresy for me to read about the early formation of the church, the good news is that I'm still here! The roof did not cave in on me and I continue to be fascinated with the line between historical, man-made doctrine and what went into the Bible as we know it now. Gnostic gospels takes the nag hammadi (sp) scrolls and shows that there were many gospels around the time of Christ. The fact that these gospels were jarred up and buried shows that they were not the favored gospels and possession was tantamount to death. Why were they different? Is it because these gospels talked about finding God within instead of using the priestly class as intermediaries? Or perhaps it was because this group of gospels treated women equal with men? Both concepts were diametrically opposed to the books that survived. So what else is there in these books and how exactly does a religion founded in blood, and reinforced by crusades and inquisitions further the true message of God? This book is a good place to start answering questions like that. Everyone will have their own opinion, but at least by reading the book it will be an informed decision.

This is a well researched book about the first Christians. The information is based on antiquated gospels found in the Egyptian desert. These gospels had a long journey before old and torn pieces could be configured so that linguists could present the gospels to the public. The early Church determined that only four gospels should be included in the new testament, and the rest would be

labeled heretical and destroyed. We are lucky that some brave soul in Egypt decided to save these precious books. Elaine Pagels is a scholar and presents the major disagreements between the Gnostics and the early Roman Catholic Church based on this finding.

This is one of her best in my opinion. Very accessible. Who knew? I went to a christian school and learned nothing about the history of Christianity

This is a book from the 1980s but it is possibly even more relevant today for those who are spiritually seeking answers that they cannot find in modern Christianity. Pagels does not favor the Gnostics or the Orthodox in describing how the politics of the time helped to shape the foundations of the Christian Church, and who became heretics by default. I find this critical examination of the Gnostics particularly helpful in understanding why their more mystical approach to Christian faith was not supported by society at large at the time. Many of the same issues face the Christian denominations today.

An excellent piece of accessible scholarship, shedding light on lost (suppressed) Christian voices that were and are every bit as Christian as what ended up as "the canon". Anyone who wants to expand his or her knowledge about the tradition, and who is open to learning that 'the canon' is a highly selective and narrow choice of all the literature that was available, reflecting the ideology of only one of the several ancient Christian perspectives, will enjoy this book. It may de-stabilize one's view of 'the canon'.

Designated one of the 100 best nonfiction books by Modern Library, this is a scholarly work that examines various gospel writings that were not accepted into the canon of the New Testament. Why were certain Christian beliefs accepted as orthodox, while others were branded heresy? While it can be a bit academic at times, it's a fascinating history of early Christianity and how the catholic (lower case "c" meaning universal--not Roman Catholic) church's roots were established, while other Christian sects fumbled and eventually disappeared.

My brothers book, he is a Gnostic and he thinks it's great.

I knew little or nothing about the Gnostic Gospels before I read this book. I find it fascinating that there were so many other versions of Jesus' life that are not included in the Old Testament. I agree

with the critics that this is one of the most important non-fiction books of the century.

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