



Beyond Belief: The Secret Gospel of Thomas

Elaine Pagels

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Special edition including the complete text of the Gospel of Thomas

Elaine Pagels, one of the world's most important writers and thinkers on religion and history, and winner of the National Book Award for her groundbreaking work *The Gnostic Gospels*, now reflects on what matters most about spiritual and religious exploration in the twenty-first century. This bold new book explores how Christianity began by tracing its earliest texts, including the secret Gospel of Thomas, rediscovered in Egypt in 1945.

When her infant son was diagnosed with fatal pulmonary hypertension, Elaine Pagels's spiritual and intellectual quest took on a new urgency, leading her to explore historical and archeological sources and to investigate what Jesus and his teachings meant to his followers before the invention of doctrine—and before the invention of Christianity as we know it.

The astonishing discovery of the Gospel of Thomas, along with more than fifty other early Christian texts unknown since antiquity, offers startling clues. Pagels compares such sources as Thomas's gospel (which claims to give Jesus' secret teaching, and finds its closest affinities with kabbalah) with the canonic texts to show how Christian leaders chose to include some gospels and exclude others from the collection we have come to know as the New Testament. To stabilize the emerging Christian church in times of devastating persecution, the church fathers constructed the canon, creed, and hierarchy—and, in the process, suppressed many of its spiritual resources.

Drawing on new scholarship—her own, and that of an international group of scholars—that has come to light since the publication in 1979 of *The Gnostic Gospels*, Pagels shows that what matters about Christianity involves much more than any one set of beliefs. Traditions embodied in Judaism and Christianity can powerfully affect us in heart, mind, and spirit, inspire visions of a new society based on practicing justice and love, even heal and transform us.

Provocative, beautifully written, and moving, *Beyond Belief*, the most personal of Pagels's books to date, shows how “the impulse to seek God overflows the narrow banks of a single tradition.” Pagels writes, “What I have come to love in the wealth and diversity of our religious traditions—and the communities that sustain them—is that they offer the testimony of innumerable people to spiritual discovery, encouraging us, in Jesus' words, to ‘seek, and you shall find.’”

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