



# Beyond Belief: The Secret Gospel of Thomas

*By Elaine Pagels*

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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 “rogue” voices of Christianity encourage and sustain “the recognition of the light within us all.”

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## **Beyond Belief: The Secret Gospel of Thomas** By Elaine Pagels Bibliography

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## Editorial Review

### Amazon.com Review

Shortly after Elaine Pagels' 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 known 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

### 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. Copyright 2003 Reed Business Information, Inc.

From [Booklist](#)

**\*Starred Review\*** In 1979, Pagels explored the Nag Hammadi scrolls in *The Gnostic Gospels*, a book she calls a "rough, charcoal sketch of the history of Christianity." The scrolls reveal a startling diversity in early Christian thought, and more than 20 years after her earlier book, Pagels remains captivated by them. This time, though, they have prompted her most personal book. She begins with the news that her son has been diagnosed with a terminal illness. She links this shocking revelation to a reexamination of the Gnostic Gospel of Thomas, which she contrasts with the gospel of John. Both gospels center their themes on a higher knowledge available in Jesus' words and message, but John wants readers to understand that the light of God is in Jesus alone. Thomas is equally insistent the light is in everyone. Pagels also focuses on how some Christian leaders, especially Irenaeus, despising the esoteric gospels, made sure that the New Testament canon was limited to the four gospels and other approved writings. Pagels' writing, spare, elegant and provocative, leads readers step-by-step down a spiritual path to one's inner self. Even those who possess only a nodding acquaintance with Gnostic writings will find themselves stimulated by her arguments and perhaps transformed by her conclusions. A fresh and exciting work of theology and spirituality. *Ilene Cooper*  
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## **Users Review**

### **From reader reviews:**

#### **Veronica Mei:**

A lot of people always spent their free time to vacation or even go to the outside with them family or their friend. Were you aware? Many a lot of people spent these people free time just watching TV, or maybe playing video games all day long. If you wish to try to find a new activity that's look different you can read the book. It is really fun to suit your needs. If you enjoy the book which you read you can spent the whole day to reading a book. The book Beyond Belief: The Secret Gospel of Thomas it is quite good to read. There are a lot of people who recommended this book. They were enjoying reading this book. In the event you did not have enough space to bring this book you can buy the particular e-book. You can m0ore simply to read this book through your smart phone. The price is not too expensive but this book provides high quality.

#### **Cheryl Thornton:**

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#### **Cora Spillane:**

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**Audra Yoder:**

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