

the gnostic gospels elaine pagels

The Gnostic Gospels Elaine Pagels: Unveiling Ancient Spiritual Texts

the gnostic gospels elaine pagels have played a pivotal role in reshaping our understanding of early Christian history and spirituality. Elaine Pagels, a renowned scholar of religion, brought these ancient texts into the spotlight with her groundbreaking research and accessible writings. Her work not only introduced the public to the mysterious and often misunderstood Gnostic Gospels but also challenged conventional narratives about Christianity's origins.

Who Is Elaine Pagels and Why Do the Gnostic Gospels Matter?

Elaine Pagels is a professor of religion at Princeton University and one of the leading authorities on early Christianity and Gnosticism. Her book, **The Gnostic Gospels**, published in 1979, became a bestseller and remains influential in theological studies. But what exactly are the Gnostic Gospels, and why did Pagels dedicate so much effort to them?

The Gnostic Gospels are a collection of early Christian writings discovered in the mid-20th century near Nag Hammadi, Egypt. These texts differ significantly from the canonical Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. They offer alternative perspectives on Jesus's teachings, emphasizing personal spiritual knowledge – or "gnosis" – as a path to salvation. This contrasts with the orthodox Christian focus on faith and institutional authority.

Understanding the Gnostic Gospels Through Elaine Pagels' Lens

Elaine Pagels' scholarship helps decode the complex and often esoteric nature of Gnostic texts. She reveals that the Gnostic Gospels were written by early Christian communities who felt marginalized by the dominant church, which eventually deemed their beliefs heretical.

Key Themes in the Gnostic Gospels

- ****Secret Knowledge:**** The Gnostic texts emphasize personal, mystical knowledge as essential for salvation.
- ****Dualism:**** Many Gnostic writings portray a cosmic struggle between light

and darkness, spirit and matter.

- ****Reinterpretation of Jesus:**** Unlike traditional portrayals, Jesus in Gnostic texts is often seen as a revealer of hidden truths.
- ****Critique of the Material World:**** Gnostics viewed the physical world as flawed or even evil, created by a lesser deity called the Demiurge.

Elaine Pagels explains how these ideas shaped early Christian diversity and were eventually suppressed by orthodox leaders who wanted to unify Christian doctrine.

The Discovery and Significance of the Nag Hammadi Library

One of the most fascinating chapters in the story of the Gnostic Gospels is their discovery. In 1945, a collection of ancient manuscripts known as the Nag Hammadi Library was unearthed in Upper Egypt. This find included over fifty texts, many of which are Gnostic in nature.

Why the Nag Hammadi Library Matters

- ****Historical Insight:**** These texts provide a window into the spiritual debates and diversity of early Christianity.
- ****Alternative Narratives:**** They challenge the monopoly of canonical scriptures by presenting different views on Jesus and salvation.
- ****Scholarly Importance:**** For Elaine Pagels and other researchers, the Nag Hammadi texts are invaluable for understanding the complexities of early Christian thought.

This discovery gave scholars like Pagels the material needed to reassess the origins of Christian theology and the processes by which certain texts were canonized while others were excluded.

Elaine Pagels' Impact on Modern Religious Thought

Before Elaine Pagels brought the Gnostic Gospels to a wider audience, most people were unaware of these alternative Christian writings. Her work has had a profound impact on both academia and popular spirituality.

Bridging Scholarship and Public Interest

Pagels' writing style is clear and engaging, making complex theological concepts accessible to general readers. By doing so, she sparked a broader conversation about religious history and the nature of faith.

Encouraging Spiritual Exploration

Many readers find in the Gnostic Gospels a more personal and mystical approach to spirituality. Elaine Pagels' interpretations invite people to explore their own beliefs beyond institutional boundaries, encouraging questions about authority, scripture, and spiritual experience.

Challenges and Criticisms Surrounding the Gnostic Gospels

While Elaine Pagels' work has been celebrated, it also faces critique from traditional Christian scholars and theologians who maintain the primacy of the canonical texts. Some argue that the Gnostic Gospels are not authentic representations of Jesus's teachings but rather later, heterodox inventions.

Understanding the Debate

- ****Historical Authenticity:**** Critics question whether the Gnostic texts reflect the earliest Christian beliefs or are products of later sects.
- ****Theological Implications:**** The Gnostic emphasis on secret knowledge conflicts with orthodox ideas about faith and salvation.
- ****Impact on Christian Unity:**** Some worry that embracing Gnostic perspectives could fracture the shared beliefs that unify mainstream Christianity.

Elaine Pagels addresses these concerns by contextualizing the Gnostic Gospels within the broader tapestry of early Christian diversity, showing that early Christianity was far from monolithic.

How to Approach the Gnostic Gospels Today

For those interested in exploring the Gnostic Gospels as presented by Elaine Pagels, there are ways to engage thoughtfully with these texts and ideas.

Tips for Readers

- **Read with an open mind:** The Gnostic Gospels offer perspectives that may challenge conventional beliefs.
- **Consider historical context:** Understanding the environment in which these texts were written enriches their meaning.
- **Compare with canonical texts:** Noting differences and similarities helps illuminate early Christian diversity.
- **Reflect personally:** Explore what the themes of knowledge, salvation, and spirituality mean to you.

Elaine Pagels encourages readers to see the Gnostic Gospels not as replacements for traditional scripture but as complementary voices that expand our understanding of faith's origins.

The Lasting Legacy of Elaine Pagels and the Gnostic Gospels

The work of Elaine Pagels continues to inspire scholars, theologians, and spiritual seekers alike. By bringing the Gnostic Gospels into public awareness, she has opened doors to a richer, more nuanced appreciation of religious history. These ancient texts, once hidden and condemned, are now recognized for their role in shaping the spiritual landscape and inviting us to question and explore the mysteries of faith in new ways.

Whether you are a student of religion, a curious reader, or someone seeking deeper spiritual insight, the Gnostic Gospels as interpreted by Elaine Pagels offer a fascinating journey into the complexities and wonders of early Christian thought.

Frequently Asked Questions

Who is Elaine Pagels and what is her connection to the Gnostic Gospels?

Elaine Pagels is a renowned religious historian and professor at Princeton University, known for her work on early Christianity and the Gnostic Gospels. She brought widespread attention to these texts through her bestselling book "The Gnostic Gospels," which explores the discovery and significance of these early Christian writings.

What are the Gnostic Gospels according to Elaine Pagels?

According to Elaine Pagels, the Gnostic Gospels are a collection of early Christian texts discovered near Nag Hammadi, Egypt, in 1945. These writings present alternative views of Jesus and Christianity, emphasizing personal spiritual knowledge (gnosis) over orthodox teachings and institutional authority.

How did Elaine Pagels' book 'The Gnostic Gospels' impact the study of early Christianity?

Elaine Pagels' book "The Gnostic Gospels" significantly impacted the study of early Christianity by highlighting the diversity of early Christian beliefs and the existence of suppressed texts. Her work challenged traditional narratives and encouraged scholars and readers to reconsider the formation of Christian doctrine and the role of marginalized voices.

What themes does Elaine Pagels explore in 'The Gnostic Gospels'?

In "The Gnostic Gospels," Elaine Pagels explores themes such as the struggle between orthodox and heterodox Christian beliefs, the nature of salvation through gnosis (spiritual knowledge), the role of women in early Christian communities, and the political and theological reasons behind the exclusion of Gnostic texts from the canonical Bible.

Why are Elaine Pagels' studies on the Gnostic Gospels still relevant today?

Elaine Pagels' studies on the Gnostic Gospels remain relevant because they provide insight into the complexity and plurality of early Christian thought, encourage critical examination of religious history and authority, and inspire contemporary discussions about spirituality, religious diversity, and the interpretation of sacred texts.

Additional Resources

The Gnostic Gospels Elaine Pagels: Unveiling Early Christian Diversity

the gnostic gospels elaine pagels have become a cornerstone in the study of early Christian history and theology, offering a profound reexamination of orthodox Christianity's origins. Elaine Pagels, a distinguished religious historian and professor at Princeton University, brought these ancient texts into the academic and public spotlight with her groundbreaking research and publications. Through her work, the Gnostic Gospels have been positioned not merely as obscure religious manuscripts but as vital sources that challenge

and enrich our understanding of early Christian thought.

Understanding the Gnostic Gospels: Historical and Theological Context

The term “Gnostic Gospels” refers to a collection of early Christian writings discovered primarily in the mid-20th century, most notably the Nag Hammadi library unearthed in Egypt in 1945. These texts, written in Coptic, include gospels, apocryphal revelations, and philosophical treatises that embody Gnostic beliefs—a spiritual worldview emphasizing secret knowledge (gnosis) as the path to salvation. Elaine Pagels’ exploration of these documents reveals a rich theological diversity that existed alongside what later became mainstream Christianity.

While the canonical New Testament presents a unified narrative of Jesus’ life and teachings, the Gnostic Gospels offer alternative perspectives on divinity, salvation, and the nature of the material world. For instance, texts like the Gospel of Thomas and the Gospel of Mary present Jesus as a revealer of hidden knowledge, often downplaying or reinterpreting his crucifixion and resurrection.

Elaine Pagels and the Rediscovery of Early Christian Diversity

Elaine Pagels’ seminal work, **The Gnostic Gospels** (1979), was pivotal in introducing these texts to a wider audience. She meticulously analyzed how the early Christian community was not monolithic but strife-ridden with theological disputes and competing interpretations of Jesus’ message. Pagels argues that the eventual dominance of orthodox Christianity was as much a political and institutional development as a theological one, marginalizing Gnostic sects and their scriptures.

Her scholarship emphasizes how the Gnostic Gospels present a radically different understanding of God and human nature. Unlike orthodox Christianity’s emphasis on a personal, loving God and the redemptive power of Christ’s death, Gnostic texts often depict the material world as a flawed creation of a lesser deity (the Demiurge), with salvation achieved through transcendental knowledge. This perspective challenges traditional Christian dogma and invites readers to reconsider the boundaries of faith and heresy in the early church.

Key Themes in the Gnostic Gospels According to

Elaine Pagels

Elaine Pagels' analysis uncovers recurring themes that distinguish Gnostic writings from orthodox Christian texts:

- **Secret Knowledge (Gnosis):** Central to Gnostic belief is the idea that salvation comes through esoteric knowledge rather than faith or works. This knowledge reveals the divine spark within humans and the illusory nature of the physical world.
- **Dualism:** A sharp distinction between the spiritual and material realms, with the material world often viewed negatively or as a prison for the soul.
- **Reinterpretation of Jesus:** Jesus is portrayed as a divine messenger bringing hidden truths, sometimes minimizing his physical suffering or emphasizing his role as a spiritual guide.
- **Role of Women:** The Gnostic texts often elevate female figures, such as Mary Magdalene, granting them prominent theological roles, which contrasts with the patriarchal tendencies of orthodox Christianity.

These themes illustrate not only theological divergence but also reflect broader social and cultural tensions within early Christian communities.

The Impact of Elaine Pagels' Scholarship on Modern Religious Studies

Elaine Pagels' contributions have had a profound impact on both academic scholarship and popular understanding of Christian origins. Her work has:

1. **Expanded the Canonical Narrative:** By highlighting the existence and significance of non-canonical texts, Pagels has encouraged scholars to view early Christianity as a pluralistic movement rather than a single, uniform tradition.
2. **Promoted Interdisciplinary Research:** Her approach combines textual criticism, historical analysis, and theological inquiry, setting a methodological standard for future studies in religious history.
3. **Stimulated Public Interest:** Beyond academia, Pagels' accessible writing style and engagement with contemporary issues have brought the Gnostic Gospels into mainstream conversations about spirituality, authority, and the nature of belief.

Her interpretation invites critical reflection on how religious institutions define orthodoxy and marginalize alternative voices.

Comparative Perspectives: Gnostic Gospels Versus Canonical Scripture

When comparing the Gnostic Gospels, as illuminated by Elaine Pagels, to the canonical New Testament, several contrasts emerge that highlight the complexity of early Christian theology:

- **Authority and Authenticity:** Canonical texts were eventually codified by church councils, whereas Gnostic writings remained outside the official canon, often labeled heretical.
- **Christology:** Orthodox Christianity emphasizes Jesus' incarnation, death, and resurrection as foundational for salvation, while Gnostic texts often downplay the physical aspects, focusing instead on spiritual enlightenment.
- **Community and Ritual:** The canonical tradition developed structured liturgies and ecclesiastical hierarchies, whereas Gnostic groups frequently operated as smaller, more secretive communities with distinct rituals centered on gnosis.

These differences underscore the diverse religious landscape in which early Christians sought meaning and identity.

The Pros and Cons of Gnostic Christianity Through Pagels' Lens

Elaine Pagels' nuanced examination of Gnostic Christianity reveals both strengths and challenges inherent in this tradition:

- **Pros:**
 - Offers a rich spiritual framework emphasizing personal enlightenment and the inner divine spark.
 - Challenges rigid dogmas, promoting religious pluralism and freedom of thought.

- Elevates marginalized voices, including women, within its theological narratives.

- **Cons:**

- Its esoteric nature made it less accessible to broader populations, potentially limiting its appeal.
- The dualistic worldview can foster a negative attitude toward the material world and human embodiment.
- Lack of institutional structure contributed to its eventual suppression and disappearance as a dominant religious force.

This balanced assessment helps readers appreciate the historical significance and theological implications of Gnosticism without idealizing or dismissing it.

The Continued Relevance of the Gnostic Gospels in Contemporary Scholarship

Elaine Pagels' pioneering work remains influential as scholars continue to explore the complexities of early Christian texts. The Gnostic Gospels provide valuable insights into the diversity of beliefs and practices that shaped Christianity's formative centuries. Moreover, these texts resonate with modern spiritual seekers interested in alternative narratives and the experiential dimensions of faith.

The ongoing study of the Gnostic Gospels also sheds light on broader questions about the construction of religious authority, the politics of canon formation, and the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion within faith communities. As new manuscripts and archaeological discoveries emerge, Pagels' analytical framework offers a vital tool for interpreting these findings within a historical and theological context.

In this way, the conversation initiated by Elaine Pagels continues, inviting deeper inquiry into the origins and evolution of one of the world's major religions.

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the gnostic gospels elaine pagels: *A Study Guide for Elaine Pagels's "The Gnostic Gospels"* Gale, Cengage Learning, 2016

the gnostic gospels elaine pagels: *The Gnostic Paul* Elaine Pagels, 1992-03-01 In this highly original work, Elaine Pagels demonstrates how evidence from gnostic sources may challenge the assumption that Paul writes his letters to combat gnostic opponents and to repudiate their claims to secret wisdom. Drawing upon evidence from the gnostic exegesis of Paul, including several Nag Hammadi texts, the author examines how gnostic exegetes cite and interpret key passages in the letters they consider Pauline—1 & 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Hebrews. Besides offering new insight into controversies over Paul in the second century, this analysis of gnostic exegesis suggests a new perspective for Pauline study, challenging students and scholars to recognize the presuppositions—hermeneutical and theological—involved in their own reading of Paul's letters. Elaine H. Pagels is the Harrington Spear Paine Professor of Religion at Princeton University. She is the author of *The Gnostic Gospels*, which won the National Book Award and the National Book Critics Circle Award, *The Johannine Gospel in Gnostic Exegesis*, *Adam, Eve, and the Serpent*, and the best-selling *Beyond Belief: The Secret Gospel of Thomas*.

the gnostic gospels elaine pagels: *Summary of Elaine Pagels's The Gnostic Gospels* Everest Media, 2022-06-13T22:59:00Z Please note: This is a companion version & not the original book. Sample Book Insights: #1 The Christian church began with the proclamation that Jesus Christ rose from the grave. This was a radical change from other religions, which celebrate cycles of birth and death. Christianity insisted that in one unique historical moment, the cycle reversed, and a dead man came back to life. #2 Some Christians, called heretics, deny the resurrection. They believe that the

person who experiences the resurrection does not meet Jesus raised physically back to life, but rather encounters Christ on a spiritual level. #3 The doctrine of bodily resurrection served an important political function in legitimizing the authority of certain men who claimed to be the successors of the apostle Peter. #4 The disciples, led by Peter, claimed that Jesus had come back to life. The group was then given authority to lead the Christian community.

the gnostic gospels elaine pagels: *Beyond Belief* Elaine Pagels, 2004-05-04 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."

the gnostic gospels elaine pagels: Beyond the Gnostic Gospels Eduard Iricinschi, Lance Jenott, Nicola Denzey Lewis, Philippa Townsend, 2013 This volume gathers contributions from both junior and senior scholars whose studies have developed in dialogue with Elaine Pagels' work on Nag Hammadi literature and ancient heresiology. Published initially in 1979, Pagels' *The Gnostic Gospels* represents a landmark of scholarship in religious studies. It not only made the Nag Hammadi writings and Gnosticism popular topics in modern culture, it also invited scholars to rethink early Christianity from new perspectives. What were previously seen as dry theological arguments and intricate Gnostic mythologies received new interpretations in the *Gnostic Gospels* as echoes of political debates about orthodoxy and heresy, clerical authority, martyrdom and gender. After *The Gnostic Gospels*, Elaine Pagels extended her research in various directions, from perceptions of sexuality in early Christianity and identity politics in the Christian creation of the Satan figure to ancient biblical interpretations, ritual in Nag Hammadi texts, and, recently, the Gospel of Judas and ancient apocalypses. The studies included in this volume engage each stage of Pagels' vast trajectory, and provide critical evaluations of the field of Gnosticism studies as it has developed over the past four decades, in the subfields of the Sethian and Valentinian schools, and beyond. The studies include new interpretations of the Nag Hammadi texts and fresh analyses of ancient heresiological literature.

the gnostic gospels elaine pagels: The Origin of Satan Elaine Pagels, 1996-04-30 From the National Book Award-winning and National Book Critics Circle Award-winning author of *The Gnostic Gospels* comes a dramatic interpretation of Satan and his role on the Christian tradition. Arresting...brilliant...this book illuminates the angels with which we must wrestle to come to the truth of our bedeviling spritual problems. —The Boston Globe With magisterial learning and the elan of a born storyteller, Pagels turns Satan's story into an audacious exploration of Christianity's shadow side, in which the gospel of love gives way to irrational hatreds that continue to haunt Christians and non-Christians alike.

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the gnostic gospels elaine pagels: The Johannine Gospel in Gnostic Exegesis: Heracleon's Commentary on John Elaine H. Pagels, 1973

the gnostic gospels elaine pagels: The Gnostic Bible Willis Barnstone, Marvin W. Meyer, 2006 The most comprehensive collection of gnostic literature ever published, this volume is the result of a unique collaboration between a renowned poet-translator and a leading scholar of early Christian texts.

the gnostic gospels elaine pagels: Reading Judas Elaine H. Pagels, Karen L. King, 2007

Evaluates the meaning of the controversial, newly-discovered Gospel of Judas, illustrating how the text offers an understanding of Judas's betrayal, the apostles' understanding of Jesus's death, and God's role in the crucifixion.

the gnostic gospels elaine pagels: *Miracles and Wonder* Elaine Pagels, 2025-04-01 From a renowned National Book Award-winning scholar, an extraordinary new account of the life of Jesus that explores the mystery of how a poor young man inspired a religion that reshaped the world. Early in her career, Elaine Pagels changed our understanding of the origins of Christianity with her work in *The Gnostic Gospels*. Now, in the culmination of a decades-long career, she explores the biggest subject of all, Jesus. In *Miracles and Wonder* she sets out to discover how a poor young Jewish man inspired a religion that shaped the world. The book reads like a historical mystery, with each chapter addressing a fascinating question and answering it based on the gospels Jesus's followers left behind. Why is Jesus said to have had a virgin birth? Why do we say he rose from the dead? Did his miracles really happen and what did they mean? The story Pagels tells is thrilling and tense. Not just does Jesus come to life but his desperate, hunted followers do as well. We realize that some of the most compelling details of Jesus's life are the explanations his disciples created to paper over inconvenient facts. So Jesus wasn't illegitimate, his mother conceived by God; Jesus's body wasn't humiliatingly left to rot and tossed into a common grave—no, he rose from the dead and was seen whole by his followers; Jesus isn't a failed messiah, his kingdom is a metaphor: he lives in us. These necessary fabrications were the very details and promises that electrified their listeners and helped his followers' numbers grow. In *Miracles and Wonder*, Pagels does more than solve a historical mystery. She sheds light on Jesus's enduring power to inspire and attract.

the gnostic gospels elaine pagels: *Why Religion?* Elaine Pagels, 2018-11-06 New York Times bestseller One of PW's Best Books of the Year One of Amazon's Best Books of the Month Why is religion still around in the twenty-first century? Why do so many still believe? And how do various traditions still shape the way people experience everything from sexuality to politics, whether they are religious or not? In *Why Religion?* Elaine Pagels looks to her own life to help address these questions. These questions took on a new urgency for Pagels when dealing with unimaginable loss—the death of her young son, followed a year later by the shocking loss of her husband. Here she interweaves a personal story with the work that she loves, illuminating how, for better and worse, religious traditions have shaped how we understand ourselves; how we relate to one another; and, most importantly, how to get through the most difficult challenges we face. Drawing upon the perspectives of neurologists, anthropologists, and historians, as well as her own research, Pagels opens unexpected ways of understanding persistent religious aspects of our culture. A provocative and deeply moving account from one of the most compelling religious thinkers at work today, *Why Religion?* explores the spiritual dimension of human experience.

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the gnostic gospels elaine pagels: *Revelations* Elaine Pagels, 2013-02-26 A profound exploration of the Bible's most controversial book—from the bestselling author of *Beyond Belief* and *The Gnostic Gospels* The strangest book of the New Testament, filled with visions of the Rapture, the whore of Babylon, and apocalyptic writing of the end of times, the Book of Revelation has fascinated readers for more than two thousand years, but where did it come from? And what are the meanings of its surreal images of dragons, monsters, angels, and cosmic war? Elaine Pagels, New York Times bestselling author and the preeminent voice of biblical scholarship to the American public (*The Philadelphia Inquirer*), elucidates the true history of this controversial book, uncovering its origins and the roots of dissent, violence, and division in the world's religions. Brilliantly weaving scholarship with a deep understanding of the human needs to which religion speaks, Pagels has written what may be the masterwork of her unique career.

the gnostic gospels elaine pagels: *Reading Judas* Elaine Pagels, Karen L. King, 2008-03-27 Discover the true meaning of the lost Gospel of Judas ... Lost for 1,600 years, the Gospel of Judas has

only now had its meaning unlocked for readers today. Its startling text included the claim that not only was Judas the favoured disciple of Jesus, but also that Judas was killed by the other disciples. Was Judas a betrayer or a loyal disciple? Did he write this shocking document? And what does it mean for us today? In *Reading Judas* Elaine Pagels and Karen L. King, world-renowned experts in religious texts, explore the meanings of this contentious gospel in detail. Here they reveal a gospel that, far from seeing Jesus' death as a sacrifice for humanity's sins, opposes the idea that God desires martyrdom and instead points towards a faith that is based on inner spiritual life. Containing a new translation of the Gospel of Judas from the original Coptic, *Reading Judas* radically challenges our notions of the Christian faith.

the gnostic gospels elaine pagels: *Adam, Eve, and the Serpent* Elaine Pagels, 1989-09-19 A National Book Award winner and New York Times bestselling author deepens and refreshes our view of early Christianity while casting a disturbing light on the evolution of the attitudes passed down to us. Confirms her reputation as both a scholar and a popular interpreter.... Continuously rewarding and illuminating. —The New York Times How did the early Christians come to believe that sex was inherently sinful? When did the Fall of Adam become synonymous with the fall of humanity? What turned Christianity from a dissident sect that championed the integrity of the individual and the idea of free will into the bulwark of a new imperial order—with the central belief that human beings cannot not choose to sin? In this provocative masterpiece of historical scholarship Elaine Pagels re-creates the controversies that racked the early church as it confronted the riddles of sexuality, freedom, and sin as embodied in the story of Genesis. And she shows how what was once heresy came to shape our own attitudes toward the body and the soul.

the gnostic gospels elaine pagels: *Revelations* Elaine Pagels, 2012-03-06 A startling exploration of the history of the most controversial book of the Bible, by the bestselling author of *Beyond Belief*. Through the bestselling books of Elaine Pagels, thousands of readers have come to know and treasure the suppressed biblical texts known as the Gnostic Gospels. As one of the world's foremost religion scholars, she has been a pioneer in interpreting these books and illuminating their place in the early history of Christianity. Her new book, however, tackles a text that is firmly, dramatically within the New Testament canon: The Book of Revelation, the surreal apocalyptic vision of the end of the world . . . or is it? In this startling and timely book, Pagels returns The Book of Revelation to its historical origin, written as its author John of Patmos took aim at the Roman Empire after what is now known as the Jewish War, in 66 CE. Militant Jews in Jerusalem, fired with religious fervor, waged an all-out war against Rome's occupation of Judea and their defeat resulted in the desecration of Jerusalem and its Great Temple. Pagels persuasively interprets Revelation as a scathing attack on the decadence of Rome. Soon after, however, a new sect known as Christians seized on John's text as a weapon against heresy and infidels of all kinds—Jews, even Christians who dissented from their increasingly rigid doctrines and hierarchies. In a time when global religious violence surges, *Revelations* explores how often those in power throughout history have sought to force God's enemies to submit or be killed. It is sure to appeal to Pagels's committed readers and bring her a whole new audience who want to understand the roots of dissent, violence, and division in the world's religions, and to appreciate the lasting appeal of this extraordinary text.

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