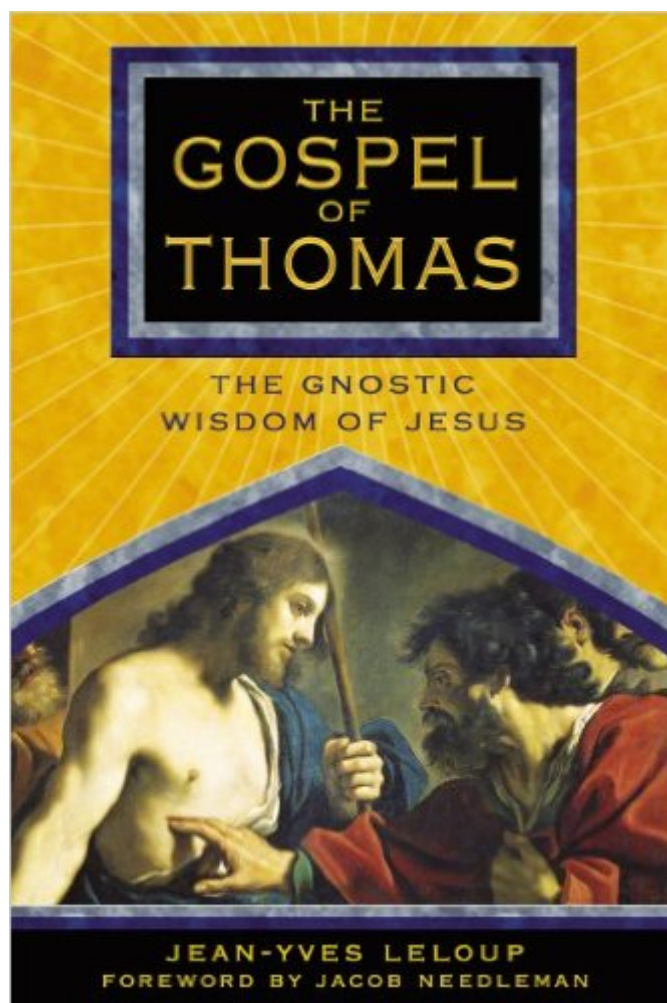


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The Gospel Of Thomas: The Gnostic Wisdom Of Jesus



Synopsis

A new translation and analysis of the gospel that records the actual words of Jesus • Explores the gnostic significance of Jesus's teachings recorded in this gospel • Explains the true nature of the new man whose coming Jesus envisioned • Translated and interpreted by the author of the bestselling *The Gospel of Mary Magdalene* and *The Gospel of Philip* One of the cache of codices and manuscripts discovered in Nag Hammadi, the Gospel of Thomas, unlike the canonical gospels, does not contain a narrative recording Christ's life and prophecies. Instead it is a collection of his teachings--what he actually said. These 114 logia, or sayings, were collected by Judas Didymus Thomas, whom some claim to be Jesus's closest disciple. No sooner was this gospel uncovered from the sands of Upper Egypt than scholars and theologians began to bury it anew in a host of conflicting interpretations and polemics. While some say it is a hodgepodge from the canonical gospels, for others it is the source text from which all the gospel writers drew their material and inspiration. In this new translation of the Gospel of Thomas, Jean-Yves Leloup shows that the Jesus recorded by the "infinitely skeptical and infinitely believing" Thomas has much in common with gnostics of non-dualistic schools. Like them, Jesus preaches the coming of a new man, the genesis of the man of knowledge. In this gospel, Jesus describes a journey from limited to unlimited consciousness. The Jesus of Thomas invites us to drink deeply from the well of knowledge that lies within, not so that we may become good Christians but so we may attain the self-knowledge that will make each of us, too, a Christ.

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Customer Reviews

If you're interested in Thomas, but baffled by what translation/edition/commentary to get, look no further. This is the one. Most English translations of Thomas are a bit too scholarly, detached and clinical. In addition, almost all are translated by non-mystics. The fact is that it takes a mystic to understand a mystic. Liberals and conservatives alike are baffled by the teachings of the greatest mystic, Jesus of Nazareth, and concretize his teachings in unintended ways. Another problem is that editions which offer commentary or history vary greatly in quality and relevance. Some might dwell on Coptic grammar, or speculations (more likely assertions) of what might or might not have been gnostic beliefs, or whether Thomas is gnostic or not, or "authentic" or not, rights and wrongs in Church history, etc. Leloup avoids these irrelevancies, and treats the text gently from his own wisdom, which is considerable. He seems a most intelligent mystic who knows the path the Jesus describes in Thomas. The layout of the book could not be better. The first 50 pages present the English translation side-by-side the Coptic, and the remainder is a saying-by-saying commentary (with numerous references to relevant Bible passages). Newcomers will undoubtedly want to read the short gospel straight through, and those who are already convinced of Thomas' worth will probably go straight to the commentary which Leloup says are more like meditations springing up from the "tilled earth of silence." The translation here by Leloup and Rowe is brilliant. Instead of a word-for-word literalism, he uses a principle more like the dynamic equivalence which most modern Bible translations use. An example of the difference: Where most translations of the prologue and first saying follow very closely to this: "These are the secret words of the living Jesus, which Didymus Judas Thomas wrote down." And he said, 'whoever finds the meaning of these words will not taste death.'" The Leloup/Rowe translation gives us: "These are the words of the Secret. They were revealed by the Living Yeshua. Didymus Judas Thomas wrote them down. And Yeshua said, 'Whoever lives the interpretation of these words will no longer taste death.'" All of the minor changes are significant, and I greatly feel, enhance the intended meaning. Whether or not the words were meant to be secret (and they're not now!) the whole theme of the gospel is the Secret of the Kingdom, the Secret of true Life. "words of the Secret" is a brilliant choice, as is "lives the interpretation" over "finds the meaning." Anyone who has spent any effort on spiritual practice soon learns that a solely intellectual understanding of spirituality counts for nothing. Lastly, Leloup's phrase "will no longer taste death," brings home that we are in death, and in the process of dying. This Kingdom that Jesus preaches is a transforming awareness and renewal by God's Spirit that obliterates the taste of death. We become alive, immersed in the awareness of the One who really is, ruled by God, the Kingdom of the Father.

In AD 397 at the Council of Carthage, the bishops of the Christian Church, under the direction of the Emperor Constantine, compiled the collection of scriptures we call the New Testament. This collection consisted of gospels, epistles and other writings related to the life of Jesus Christ and his Apostles. Many works did not make the cut at Carthage, either because they were considered spurious or because they did not meet the doctrinal requirements of the Roman Church. The rejected works became known as the Apocrypha. The Church did its best to root out and destroy these writings, but a number of them survived. One of the survivors is the Gospel of Thomas, one of 53 ancient parchments known as the Nag Hammadi library, discovered in the desert of upper Egypt in 1945, which have revolutionized the study of early Christianity. The Gospel of Thomas is not a narrative of the life of Jesus, but rather a collection of his reputed sayings and aphorisms. The document was first translated into English from Sahidic Coptic, an Egyptian tongue that succeeded the language of the Pharaohs, in 1959. The Apostle Didymus Judas Thomas is perhaps best known to us today as "Doubting Thomas," because, as the story goes, he refused to believe that Jesus had risen from the dead until he put his hand in his lord's wounds. In this edition, French scholar Jean-Yves Leloup has given us a new translation of the Gospel of Thomas, alongside the original Coptic text, as well as a commentary on each of the 114 logia, or sayings, of Jesus (here called by his Aramaic name Yeshua) that were collected by Thomas. Here, for example, is one of the shorter logia (singular: logion): Logion 82 Yeshua said: Whoever is near to me is near to the fire. Whoever is far from me is far from the Kingdom. This particular saying demonstrates well that the Gospel of Thomas is both independent of the canonical New Testament and parallel to it. The saying was quoted by a number of early Christian writers, including Origen. Interestingly, in the Gospel of Thomas (Logion 12), Jesus names his brother James, and not Peter, as Christ's successor on earth. He tells his disciples: "Go to James the Just: All that concerns heaven and earth is his domain." There was in fact a Jerusalem-based Christian church under James's leadership, which eventually lost out to, and was eliminated by, the Rome-based church of Peter and Paul. The Gospel of Thomas, like the rest of the Nag Hammadi parchments, is an example of Gnostic Christianity, a strain of belief that focuses on the quest for self-knowledge, and on becoming one with the universe and God. This approach was considered heresy by the Roman Church. Leloup's commentaries focus on these reputed aphorisms of Jesus as examples of Gnostic wisdom, compares them with canonical New Testament materials and presents them as nuggets for personal meditation. Even those who do not choose to use the Gospel of Thomas for their own self-enlightenment will find this material fascinating. The sayings, presented by Thomas as the actual words of Jesus, offer a different and refreshing glimpse into the early Christian world. [A version of this review appeared in

Mysteries Magazine in 2005.]

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