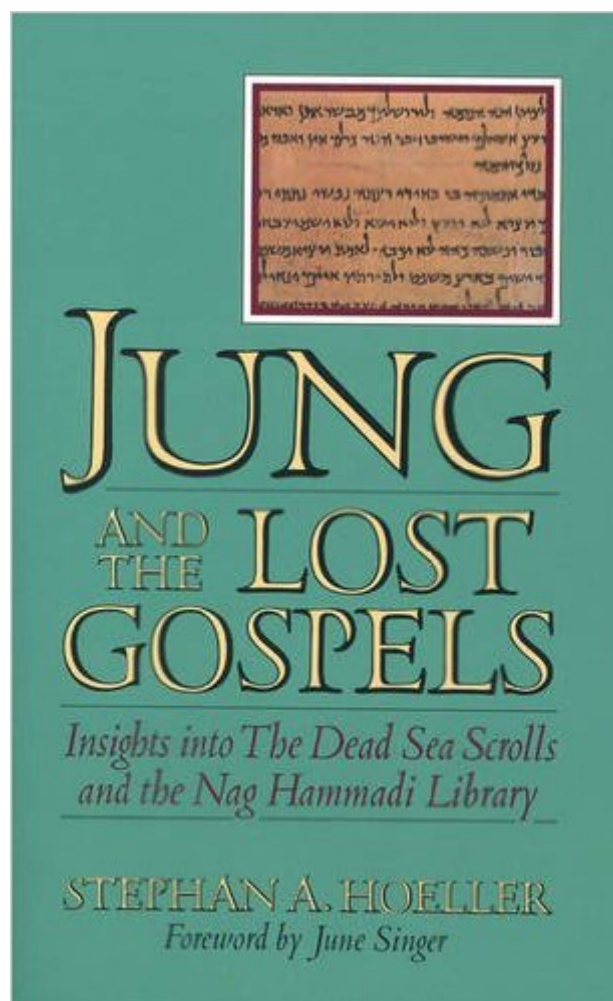


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Jung And The Lost Gospels: Insights Into The Dead Sea Scrolls And The Nag Hammadi Library



Synopsis

The "Lost Gospels" refer to the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Nag Hammadi Library, both discovered in the 1940s. The Nag Hammadi Library consists of writings found by two peasants who unearthed clay jars in 1945 in upper Egypt. These did not appear in English for 32 years, because the right to publish was contended by scholars, politicians, and antique dealers. The Dead Sea Scrolls, discovered in clay jars in Palestine by a goatherder in 1947, weathered similar storms. The first team of analysts were mostly Christian clergy, who weren't anxious to share material that frightened church leaders. As Dr. Hoeller shows, they rightly feared the documents would reveal information that might detract from unique claims of Christianity. Indeed, the Dead Sea Scrolls and Nag Hammadi Library both contradict and complement accepted tenets of the Old and New Testaments. As to the connection with Jung, Dr. Hoeller states, "Jung knew that the one and only tradition associated with Christianity that regarded the human psyche as the container of the divine-human encounter was that of the Gnostics of the the first three centuries of our era. For this reason he called for a renewed appreciation of this ancient tradition, and particularly for a return to the Gnostic sense of God as an inner directing and transforming presence." Dr. Hoeller goes on in his preface, "His sympathetic insight into the myths, symbols, and metaphors of the Gnostics, whom by his own admission he regarded as long-lost friends, continues as the brightest beacon of our day..."

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Customer Reviews

Among the many scores of books on Gnosticism now available, there are two which I consider essential reading: "The Gnostic Gospels" by Elaine Pagels and this book, "Jung and the Lost Gospels", by Stephan Hoeller. Pagels elucidates the nature and historical roots of Gnosticism while introducing the Gnostic texts found at Nag Hammadi. Hoeller carries the discussion forward to our own time and brings the immediacy of a modern psychological understanding to the ageless message of Gnosis. Readers who delve directly into a reading of the Nag Hammadi Library often find themselves bewildered -- or simply overwhelmed -- by the complexity of the Gnostic worldview. Hoeller offers aid by clearly and systematically examining the central themes and myths of Gnosticism. His discussion of the Essene communities (whose writings we find in the Dead Sea Scrolls) helps further develop a basic understanding of the creative and heterogeneous visionary environment in which Christianity was born. The name "Jung" (as in C. G. Jung, the Swiss psychologist) may attract some readers, while undoubtedly frightening many others. Hoeller is not overbearing in his use of Jung. This is a book about the birth and continuing life of Gnosticism. Those seeking a living understanding of "Gnosis" will find here wonderful new insights into both Gnosticism, Jung, and themselves.

This insightful text is an elegantly written introduction to Gnosticism and a simple though comprehensive appraisal of the Dead Sea Scrolls, found by a goat herder in 1947, and the Nag Hammadi Library that was discovered by two peasants in 1945 in Upper Egypt. These writings are contemporary with the canonical biblical texts, which illustrate a different perspective of what constitutes the spiritual life, and the teachings of Jesus Christ. These works have been branded heretical because their message in some ways, contradicts the orthodoxy of the reigning Church. Taking the word 'heresy' in the literal sense, meaning to take the position in opposition to the orthodoxy of the time, the Nag Hammadi texts are indeed 'heretical'. Hoeller not only presents the works of the Essenes (The people of the scrolls) and the Gnostic Gospels in an easy to comprehend format, but also connects these works with the depth psychology of the famous Swiss psychiatrist, C.G. Jung. What is fascinating about this connection is that Jung did not come to these materials by way of other researches and scholarship, but through a personal, direct encounter of the images and myths themselves. If you are interested in how Jung came upon this material by way of self-analysis and 'active imagining', read his autobiographical text, 'Memories, Dreams and Reflections.' Jung's approach to healing the psyche and teachings of the Gnostics are strikingly similar; this method towards the spiritual life is not based on following a particular dogma or the way of 'faith', but through experience of Self and the divine. There are numerous paths towards

enlightenment and the Divine. In my personal experience, one perspective is not necessarily more 'true' than another...faith in the divine and the practice of good works is but one path; believing in the biblical canon in a literal sense, on face value, has aided many an individual out of the depths of despair and has set them on the road to living a meaningful and spiritual existence. But for some individuals, faith is not enough. To the Gnostic, the notion or phenomenon of experience takes precedence over metaphysical speculation or literal faith in the Gospels that have been handed down to us from the traditional Church. What the American philosopher William James described as "faith in someone else's faith" does not provide spiritual meaning for a lot people. Some of us hunger for a direct experience or vision of the Divine, and this is what the Gnostic scriptures advise us to do. By truly knowing oneself, one can discover God. In the last chapter of this text, 'From Hiroshima to the Secret Gospels', the author warns of the current condition of our age, in terms of the potential annihilation of the entire planet with our weapons of mass destruction. This is not some rhetorical 'scare tactic' or apocalyptic ranting, but a genuine call for us to take a close look at ourselves, the dark sides of our natures, and to make a concerted effort to heal. The Lost Gospels might possibly provide us with greater insight into the Divine, thus avoiding our self-perpetuating extinction.

A very good book for those just beginning to study Gnostic Christianity ("Elements of Gnosticism" by Stuart Holroyd and "The Gnostic Gospels" by Elaine Pagels are also very good). I especially liked the chapter "The Secret Sayings of Jesus". In that chapter, the author provided a very helpful analysis of selected sayings from "The Gospel of Thomas". That analysis gave me a good basic understanding of the Gnostic Jesus. The chapter "Means of Transformation", equally good, basically puts Gnostic Christians in a good light. It accomplishes that by refuting some of the negative stereotypes against Gnostic Christians (for example the erroneous ideas that they hate God and the physical world and have no regard for virtue). The chapter "Redemption and Ecstasy" is also interesting to me, personally, because it drew some parallels between Gnostic Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism and Judaism's Kabbalah. Students of comparative religion, I believe, would find that chapter of interest. As for the Jungian content of the book, I unfortunately can't really comment on it. The reason is that I admit that I have never read any of Jung's works only Gnostic interpretations of it. Let's just say I'm learning about Jung little by little as a side benefit of reading Gnostic writings.

This is a great book for anyone interested in gnosticism. I tried reading the gnostic texts and found

them to be a little confusing, but after this book I feel I can go back to them with a little insight. However, you have to keep in mind that this is not a purely academic book. This is Mr. Hoeller's opinions and feelings in some cases and in parts he can be a little heavy-handed. If you can ignore the bits where he's trying way too hard to convince you of a specific point then you'll be fine. Gnosis is all about coming to your own conclusions (I hope). It's an excellent starting point for any study of gnostic texts and the whole concept of gnostic christianity. I recommend reading it alongside The Nag Hammadi Library (ISBN 0-06-066935-7) or The Other Bible (ISBN 0-06-250030-9).

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