


# **A New New Testament: A Bible for the 21st Century Combining Traditional and Newly Discovered Texts**

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It is time for a new New Testament.

Over the past century, numerous lost scriptures have been discovered, authenticated, translated, debated, celebrated. Many of these documents were as important to shaping early-Christian communities and beliefs as what we have come to call the New Testament; these were not the work of shunned sects or rebel apostles, not alternative histories or doctrines, but part of the vibrant conversations that sparked the rise of Christianity. Yet these scriptures are rarely read in contemporary churches; they are discussed nearly only by scholars or within a context only of *gnostic* gospels. Why should these books be set aside? Why should they continue to be lost to most of us? And don't we have a great deal to gain by placing them back into contact with the twenty-seven books of the traditional New Testament—by hearing, finally, the full range of voices that formed the early chorus of Christians?

To create this *New New Testament*, Hal Taussig called together a council of scholars and spiritual leaders to discuss and reconsider which books belong in the New Testament. They talked about these recently found documents, the lessons therein, and how they inform the previously bound books. They voted on which should be added, choosing ten new books to include in *A New New Testament*. Reading the traditional scriptures alongside these new texts—the Gospel of Luke with the Gospel of Mary, Paul's letters with The Letter of Peter to Philip, The Revelation to John with The Secret Revelation to John—offers the exciting possibility of understanding both the new and the old better. This new reading, and the accompanying commentary in this volume, promises to reinvigorate a centuries-old conversation and to bring new relevance to a dynamic tradition.

## **A New New Testament: A Bible for the 21st Century Combining Traditional and Newly Discovered Texts Details**

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# **From Reader Review A New New Testament: A Bible for the 21st Century Combining Traditional and Newly Discovered Texts for online ebook**

## **Cathy Leming says**

I've already read many of the Gnostic gospels (or ex-Canon gospels) and found them boring and uninspiring. Still, I wanted to keep an open mind, so I went to hear Hal Taussig lecture about his passion for biblical scholarship and how this book came into being and why he and his colleagues think these books should be added to the official Canon. After all, maybe I'm missing something in my own studies.

I'm not.

As a biblical scholar, Dr. Taussig is passionate about writings, especially as they pertain to the "historical" Jesus. The council/assembly which he assembled and attributes the selection of these books for inclusion into the Canon are, to my understanding of his explanation, his contemporaries within the United Methodist Church and "friends." That's ok, but this is very unlike the fascinating Convocation at Nicea in 325 ACE, which consisted of Jewish leaders, Gnostics, Eastern Christians and Roman Christians, who had set understandable criteria for inclusion in what we now call the New Testament. At the Convocation at Nicea in 325 ACE, it was agreed upon by all, even Gnostics, that any writing had to have an extant parchment, even if not whole, directly from the generation of the apostles. Subsequent complete or nearly complete extant documents had to be in agreement with older extant fragments. In the case of the writings proposed for inclusion (and included in his book, an unofficial Canon of sorts) by Dr. Taussig and his colleagues, none of those selected date back to the generation of the Apostles. There are older writings outside of our New Testament ... older than these Gnostic writings, such as the letters of Ignatius and Polycarp, which weren't even considered by Dr. Taussig and his team. And nor should they be considered, necessarily, for inclusion into our New Testament/accepted Canon. Some of the criteria that Dr. Taussig's colleagues cited are 'need from a female voice,' or different viewpoint. I don't know that we should be ticking diversity boxes within the official Canon, nor do we have to since the writers were pretty diverse in thought from the day.

The Nag Hammadi documents are quite frankly not that old in comparison to the four gospels of the official Canon and the letters of Ignatius, Letter of Polycarp, and 1 Clement, all written before 115 ACE. In Taussig's assembly, there seems a bias toward Egyptian Gnosticism, which has produced little more than forgeries throughout history.

I'm not saying we shouldn't read ancient writings. We should. In fact, please read them, because they take the mystery out of all this Dan Brown stuff and shine the light on the fiction of The Davinci Code ... The so-called Gospels of Mary Magdalene and Thomas are boring and uninspiring and offer nothing new or exciting, so why an attempt at making them part of the official Canon? Just urge biblical scholarship.

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## **Alice says**

I finally finished.

This is one of the best examples I've seen of work that takes scholarship and makes it accessible to people

with only a passing knowledge of the topic. What I ended up enjoying most about it, however, wasn't the commentary or background information, but the translation. The translation is based on the Open English Bible with some subtle but powerful quirks that make for interesting reading.

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## Scott Haraburda says

Goodreads First Reads Giveaway Book.

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This is a controversial book involving Christianity. I've been told that it's best to keep quiet about certain topics. Fortunately, the author didn't follow this advice since religion is one of them. One can easily view the numerous reviews about this book and believe that anyone reading it will suffer the wrath of God Almighty, risking eternal damnation of brimstone and hellfire in the afterlife. But that shouldn't stop you from reading it. This author invites us to read with an open mind and common sense, diehard Christians of many structured religions might have a difficult time with this book. It's a brave soul to inform us of additional information regarding Jesus.

**A New New Testament** is a recent book that challenges us to consider other ancient Christian documents when assessing the Christian faith. The editor, Hal Taussig, bravely suggests that we should "lean forward with interest and engagement" with a "new way of thinking." He chose to add ten books, two prayers, and one song, which were recommended by a council of nineteen religious scholars, including a couple of rabbis.

The non-canonical books included were selected by qualified experts capable of providing a scholarly examination of the Christian faith. But, that doesn't mean they were qualified to develop canonical decisions. So implying this is another official **New Testament** is inappropriate. A better title, such as **Early Christian Writings**, would have been a better choice.

I have no doubt that these non-canonical book additions are important ancient books that show both continuity with the early church and discontinuity. Although they date back to the earliest days of Christianity, they were rejected by the early church. Yet, let me remind you that we live in the 21st century which has a vastly different worldview than that of the 1st or 2nd centuries. If one believes that the Holy Spirit is continually working in the world, then why must our sacred texts be never-changing?

As we are well aware, the basis of Christianity comes from the Bible, mostly the **New Testament**. The Bible is really a collection of dozens of separate books written by authors from all walks of life ranging from kings to laborers, and from military leaders to professional workers. Yet, these authors, who mostly never met one another, wrote them over a time span of more than a thousand years and were originally written in Hebrew, Greek and Aramaic – not English. Regrettably, biblical words have been used to justify killing, including justifying violence to racial minorities, women, Jews, and homosexuals.

To understand the Bible, we must understand why the contents were included. These were decisions made by men, not God, though. True, we can say that the contents were inspired by God. But, God didn't make these decisions, and He definitely didn't personally write the books. After spending countless hours looking through Scriptures, I couldn't locate anything indicating that God wanted a complete, closed, never-changing, single collection of books for a Bible. Nor, could I find anything written that He inspired the Bible, let alone telling us that our current Bible is both infallible and accurate. Scriptures are inspired; the

Bible isn't.

From 50 through 100 CE, the New Testament books were written. However, other books were written during this period that could have been included, such as **Didache** in 70 CE and the **Epistle of Barnabas** in 100 CE, which weren't even selected for Taussig's book. As for the official selection of **New Testament** books, there were many who challenge the list chosen and recommend the inclusion of other books.

Can we learn from reading these non-canonical books? At least, reading them provides us more insight into the environment of the times and into additional literature that could supplement our further understanding of the canonical books.

I firmly believe that only God has complete knowledge about the teachings of Jesus. Christians, who are mortal humans, should remain open-minded and grow in their faith, even if it means replacement of previous beliefs. Otherwise, faith will be nothing more than blind credulity, retrospective backwardness, and idle superstition. Close-minded faith prevents Christians from becoming wise, making it difficult for them to develop a closer relationship with God. Sadly, most people today prefer to be intellectually lazy and let others assess the data for them and tell them what it means. Furthermore, we tend to interpret information based solely upon our own biases and frame of references. As such, most Christians are biblically illiterate, meaning they don't know what their religion is about. This book offers us the opportunity to understand more about Jesus and the early Christians who followed Him.

Sadly, most Christians treat the Bible as a holy relic, something to worship. Definitely not something to read or understand. Why? We live in a world where people prefer simple sayings, such as quick sound-bites of single scriptural verses such as John 3:16, instead of hard work to understand the context and meanings of biblical sources to discover the truth. The **New Testament** as an example isn't really about Jesus being a god and defining our life's purpose as found in His death. Instead, our life should be found in His example of "accepting the excluded, healing the sick, strengthening the weak, loving the despised, and challenging the powerful. Consequently, the acid test of Christianity is whether its followers are people who do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly on the Earth.

If you're closed-minded and don't want to learn more about Jesus, then don't waste your time and effort with this book. It'll just completely frustrate you and create un-Christian judgmental feelings of hate and contempt towards this council of scholars. Otherwise, it's definitely worth the read.

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### **Ian says**

Going into this book skeptical of translations already, I was not too impressed. I was interested in the historical value of comparing the various canonical and non-canonical texts, but there were deficiencies in the translations. I could recognize a loose translation in familiar texts which made me not trust some of the other texts. On the plus side, the introductions to the various books were helpful and they did provide some other reading. I would recommend this book with a nuance. It did make certain text more available, but the translation can be a bit sketchy.

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### **Brent Soderstrum says**

I enjoyed the commentaries on both the new books added to the New Testament and the standard ones. I had always assumed everyone agreed on what was in the Bible but I learned that wasn't true. Didn't think the 10 books added by the Council of New Orleans were great additions. Also was thrown by the gender neutral changes made to the standard New Testament books such as "Child of Humanity" instead of "Son of Man".

Got me into God's Word again which is always a good thing though.

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### **Jon Cooper says**

This collection of first and second century Christian writings has a whole lot to offer, and in general I can recommend it. I especially like the Companion at the end and the appendices (especially Appendix IV, which is all about other resources). I'm hit and miss on the translation - for the most part it reads very smoothly, but I don't like when it insists on being gender neutral - I realize that this is, to a large extent, a matter of preference, but I've never agreed with the American obsession with gender neutral language, not, at least, when it comes to ancient literature. And sometimes, in this translation, it makes for some awkward reading moments. Still and all, a great introduction to Nag Hammadi and early Christian literature.

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### **Thom Willis says**

"A *New New Testament*"? Seriously? Even Martin Luther wasn't daring enough to touch the New Testament. He confined himself to chopping up the old. The fact that this book was composed by "Christians" is even worse. The book claims to have been organized by a group of individuals "modeled on early church councils of the first six centuries," (p.555) but missing a one crucial ingredient - the successors of the apostles. Indeed, only one Catholic is on the list of editors (a sister involved with the LCWR) and not a single Orthodox Christian.

So this isn't just a collection of the traditional Christian texts plus a few new ones recently discovered. It's a theological claim to authority - the authority to re-write scripture. At least the Old Testament canon of the Reformation was based in some conciliar authority, vague as it was. This is just a load of nonsense. I haven't yet read the editorial comments, but I will, and will hopefully edit this review in accordance.

It's also of note that the collection includes only gnostic texts, and seems to deliberately exclude other, more orthodox though non-canonical texts like the *Shepherd of Hermas*, *The Didache*, and *The Protoevangelium of James*.

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### **Wade says**

I'm really enjoying this text more now that I'm actually into reading it and not just the prefatory material. The voting mechanism for inclusion criteria initially seemed haphazard, but the further explanations in the introductions to each work gave a bit more of a feel for how they reached a consensus on which 'new' texts to include, and why. Each introduction also include a bit on 'Why should this text matter to a 21st century reader', which revealed a little more of the 'why?' of inclusion. The careful arrangement of the texts to put genres and schools of authorship together was effective, though some works (like the Odes of Solomon) are deliberately split up and placed through the work. Some of the most interesting works to me were the more

'liturgical' pieces like prayers and hymns that showed how some early Christian communities may have worshipped. Though I'd read some of these works before individually, it is nice to have them put in a volume alongside the traditional new testament.

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## **Katie says**

### **[Citation Needed]**

The most striking thing about this outsized tome is not its size but its complete lack of citations. To be fair I got a reviewers' copy and maybe footnotes will be added to the final version--if so that's a pretty huge omission for us reviewers to have to work around. Again and again Taussig makes assertions that beg for a citation for me to check out--novel claims I have never heard before, claims that contradict what I have learned from other scholars, claims that contradict other claims in this same book--and there is nothing. I began to feel irate about this, as though perhaps Taussig does not trust his reader enough to empower us with the ability to check up on his reasoning and his facts. It felt high-handed, especially at points where I knew that he was stating something as being "the scholarly consensus" when it, in fact, is no such thing. If I picked up on that here and there, and I am no scholar or expert, what else was he keeping from me?

This is especially ironic considering that again and again he trumpets that this book represents a big deal first time opportunity for the lay person to see what scholars already know about and that some "bubble of secrecy" has been burst. I don't know what bubble. Nag Hammadi is old news at this point and, despite the fact that Newsweek seems to rediscover it the week of Easter every year to sell magazines (RIP to that, I guess) I don't think the fact that these outre sorts of alternative "gospels" are out there shocks anyone anymore. If you were curious about them, no doubt you have already looked at them by now. Perhaps in one of the many blockbuster nonfiction titles that have come out since the late 1980s. Perhaps free, online, where you can access any of these "hidden" titles in half a second, with Google.

Taussig never really makes a compelling case for why we need a new New Testament. He cites vague "spiritual crises" and implies that church-goers are bored and unmoved by the current canon. He talks with a lot of purple prose about how emotional or pretty some of the new texts are. But he does not hold them to any kind of test of truth, consistency, or authenticity. He does not defend them where they depart--often radically--from the whole of Christian orthodoxy. He doesn't directly debunk the orthodoxy he seeks to unseat, even, but kind of shrugs it off. He doesn't seem to care about the truth either way, shockingly. He just likes what he likes, and he thinks these books are thrilling and exciting and new. I kept thinking of the way some of his generation argue against monogamy, as I read his superficial justifications on the basis of "needing to change things up a bit."

### **The Ultimate Boredom of Heresy**

I know we're not supposed to say heresy--or gnostic, Taussig has a whole section on why he objects to the term "gnosticism." But really, there is such a thing. Orthodox Christianity has been defined for thousands of years by the ecumenical creeds. The various denominations are further defined by their confessions and catechisms, written or understood. There's a lot of heresy in this book, which is, no shock to anyone, why these noncanonical books were left out of the canon. Much of it is very boring heresy, nothing particularly shocking or countercultural. A lot of it is straight up nonsense. One gnostic (I keep using that word, because it means something) text is simply a string of contradictory statements such as "I am a holy woman and a whore." It reminded me of that Meredith Brooks song from 1999, "I'm a b\*\*\*\* I'm a lover," etc. There's



nothing new or profound about this, it is simply nonsense that sounds "deep." Much of the stuff Taussig marvels over as "poetic" is similar strings of doggerel and nonsense. The Church Fathers showed good sense in leaving dubious, boring, badly written books out of the canon.

Oh a word about fathers...and men...and women...gender is a preoccupation of this book, and I am sure they would all say they are feminists. Yet the preoccupation with women's rights has a curious set of blind spots. They zero right in on things like 1 Timothy "oppressively" affirming the traditional Greek and Jewish household structure. But when the much-vaunted "Gospel" of Thomas asserts that "women are not worthy of life" and puts the words in Jesus' mouth that he will "make Mary Magdalene male" so that she is so worthy...not a word to be said about that! Not one single word about this appalling misogyny that far outweighs the gravity of any of Paul's statements, nor any of the similar woman-hating proclamations that are a known and unsurprising characteristic of gnostic writings. Gnosticism hates the body and the earthly life, and women are often equated with these things. Why is this preferable to Pauline Christianity for women? Don't ask me, ask Taussig. But he gives no clues in this book.

And a further word about councils. The committee or "council" that put this show together consists of some Christians, yes, some of them are even scholars. They ignore a lot of other scholars who don't agree with them, and there's nothing like a peer review, but I think Taussig suspects his readers are idiots and won't pick up on that. Anyway, there are also two rabbis (fair enough, I guess, if they have expertise in early Rabbinic Judaism, which neither of them appear to have) and a "yogic practitioner." Really? What a mockery this is of the real Christian councils, or anything like "scholarly consensus." And to add to the ridiculousness, they are all American. Even though most Christians in the world, well, are not.

If you want really wacky heresy, though, just skim to the very end where in the "Secret Revelation of John" (a very obvious work of gnosticism!) we learn about no fewer than three goddesses and a couple of gods. Including the old gnostic chestnut, the "demiurge."

Weirdly enough for a guy who works at a rabbinical school, Taussig never addresses the antisemitism implicit in the gnostic theologies in these works, where the Old Testament God is cast as wicked. Then again he approvingly references, of all people, MARCION! Without a word about how his heresy is at the root of much Christian antisemitism in history, how it has haunted us like a bad smell, and how it is, sadly, revived unwittingly by many a liberal Christian "reformer" in the present day who rails against the "violent God" of the Old Testament in contrast to the lamb-like meekness of Christ.

### **Appeal To The Emotions**

Again and again, Taussig talks about feelings. What is the object of this quest? Theology, I thought, was meant to be a search for the truth about God, and how to articulate it and apply it to this world. For Taussig, it's a search for sensations and feelings and stimulation. Again and again he talks about "lush language" or the like being the criteria for a dubious work being included. But the better question is never asked--is it true? Is it faithful? Does it tell the truth about God? Those questions appear to be beside the point to Taussig. He does not want to enlighten us, he wants us to feel "delight" and "clap our hands" and feel thrilled and emotionally effusive. I got the impression he was thinking of us readers as a lot of silly toddlers, who would shriek with innocent delight when he peek-a-booped from behind the divan holding an ancient scroll.

In addition to repeatedly getting the impression that Taussig thinks the reader is insipid and worthy of nothing better than a superficial, insipid religious experience, I got tired of his need to compulsively repeat himself on certain seemingly unimportant points. A perfect example: how he again and again and again beats us over the head with the point that "apostle" isn't the best word for Paul, a better translation would be

"ambassador." Honestly: so what? Why does he keep saying this? He seems to think every tiny preconceived notion he can debunk is a victory against the unseen enemy--American GOP fundamentalist Protestants--but it really is only very silly and childish.

### **Why Not Be Jewish?**

The editor of this ambitious tome--as well as Crossan, who wrote the foreword, and some of the panel members who put it together--are familiar to me from the time in the 1990s when I was introduced to the work of the Jesus Seminar. I was a teenager with little to no religious instruction or guidance, but an earnest if bare bones Christian Protestant belief set. I will always credit the Jesus Seminar--in particular the work of Funk and Borg--with my decision at age 16 that I should convert to Judaism. The logic was like this: the Jesus Seminar convincingly made their point, that Jesus never claimed to be the Messiah, never rose from the dead, and was just a nice rabbi with good ideas about how to live, and that all that supernatural stuff was wishful thinking tacked on by credulous later people with agendas. (Convincingly to me then, as a teenager with no religious instruction--not so convincingly to me now that I am more well-read.) Furthermore, these Christian scholars pointed out that Paul was the one who put together most of what is now called Christianity, and he was a misogynist and not very nice by their tally. Why struggle with Paul and the scarier parts of the New Testament, though, if Jesus did not claim to be the Messiah and never rose from the dead? It seemed quite logical then to cling to the strong ethical monotheistic tradition of Judaism, from which the nice rabbi came forth, rather than persist in calling myself a Christian.

I am today a Christian and not a Jew, despite spending a very enriching span of my teens and early 20s exploring and learning about Judaism. I have gained immense respect for the Jewish tradition and helpful knowledge of the Hebrew Bible. But I wonder, every time I pick up a book by one of these guys, many of whom not only persist in clinging to Christian institutions and labels like UCC and United Methodist but are actually ordained ministers with pulpits, why they are not Jewish by choice? It still seems to me the only logical and reasonable thing to do, once you believe Jesus is not Divine but that the ethical tradition he represented was just swell.

Why is Hal Taussig Christian? I would love to ask him. He even teaches at a fine rabbinical school! If not Christ the Redeemer, the Trinity, the Nicene creed, the resurrection--if all of that is just dross, as he implies again and again--then what keeps him holding onto that collar and cross? Sentimentality? Ethnic affiliations? What?

Though I guess perhaps "Christian" isn't the word he would prefer, as he studiously and awkwardly avoids it in this text. Again and again he replaces the natural, commonly used term "Christian" with formulations like "Christ assemblies" and even "Christ people." This just seems plain contrarian to me, and frankly a bit childish--as does the whole overdone, played-out faux rivalry between vaguely humanist-unitarian "liberals" and raving literalist "fundamentalists." As though those really were the only two possibilities for believers.

Has Taussig, in all his years in ministry in a mainline denomination, really stopped believing in Christians like myself--a member of a moderate, mainline Protestant denomination who actually holds fast to the Nicene Creed and the Lutheran Confessions like the good ole ELCA website says we all do? Or am I the last one out on some terrible in-joke?

This book is not even worth the price of admission to view the curiosities contained in it. Since Taussig refuses to cite his sources even for the most outlandish claims and elsewhere is just baldly wrong (for instance when he asserts some obscure manuscript is innovative in that it uses a feminine metaphor for God, when in fact such metaphors are in, oh, Isaiah for one) he is not a reliable narrator or guide, and I don't trust

his novel translations. This book is clearly meant for an echo chamber of greying baby boomer liberal Protestants and lefty Catholics who will, the publisher clearly assumed, ooh and ahh over the daring slaying of frumpy orthodoxies and tipping of freedom-impinging sacred cows. But it fails even to shock, these cows having long since been tipped by Funk, Spong, et al. He even gets in the usual dig at Augustine and Luther being "fixated on sin" and sails along to a groove only his generation has ever cared to dance to at length, about "sin being an illusion." So very, very tired and boring and a dead end.

It strikes me that while Taussig anticipates us swooning over his gnostic finds, he neglects to remove any of the books he regards as problematic. Why not? If you can include something about the "Mother" and "Father" bringing forth other deities, why not take out the Timothy bit you so obviously hate? This speaks, I think to his motivation--to continue using Christian infrastructure to enrich his life and reputation, while also thinking he's some great iconoclast because he points out that the New Testament didn't fall out of the sky but was selected by councils.

In the end the high-handedness, the arrogance, and the bald hypocrisy made me angry and sad. Clearly Taussig does not respect his readers, and does not respect the Christian canon, and does not have any sense of humbleness about any of this. He delights in "proving" everything an orthodox Christian believes is somehow outmoded and mistaken, but persists in his pastorate, and again, I just have to ask: why? Is it for the pension, the social cachet, the nifty uniform? It defies all reason.

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### **Harry Allagree says**

This is a collection of the books of the canonical New Testament interspersed with many newly discovered texts over the last century which date back to the origins of the Christ movement. Some are similar to the New Testament books, some contain new information/ideas, some are downright bizarre. At any rate, the purpose of the collection is to show that there were many texts reflecting the diversity of thinking & lives of early 1st & 2nd century followers of the Jesus movement, many of which were destroyed or lost over the centuries. Perhaps the book is more useful for Scripture scholars. I didn't find it particularly helpful beyond the exposure to some new writings from that era.

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### **Brooke says**

#### **Enrich and Expand Your Heart and Your Mind**

Here is a collection of early Christian works discovered in the past two centuries. Reading these other voices enhances our understanding of the works which were originally selected for inclusion in what we know as "The New Testament." We can only delight and marvel at the light these works shed on the familiar texts. Enjoy!

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### **Marcy says**

Need a scripture background to follow. Not an easy read.

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**David S. says**

A refreshing translation of The New Testament. The treatment of women is especially welcome.

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**Kelly says**

\*I won this book from Goodreads' First Reads

This is an interesting (and certainly EXTENSIVE) read, but don't treat it as a continuation/rewrite of the Bible; instead, read it objectively as a companion. This guide combines all of the old Christian and "gnostic" writings, and gives insight to many different perspectives of the New Testament.

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**Jud Barry says**

A new canon that places recently-discovered 1st/2nd c. CE Christian writings (mostly Nag Hammadi) in among the traditional books of the New Testament. The result is eye-opening and refreshing.

Hal Taussig provides useful commentary on the history of NT canon formation. He also advances the view that the term "Gnostic" should be retired as having no real doctrinal significance relating to the newly added material, and as being tainted by an unfair association with heresy.

Among the most popular additions will be the Odes of Solomon, celebratory Christian psalms. Originally in Coptic, the manuscripts were apparently "discovered" in the office of a professor who couldn't remember where he'd acquired them. Soon to be a movie starring Harrison Ford.

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