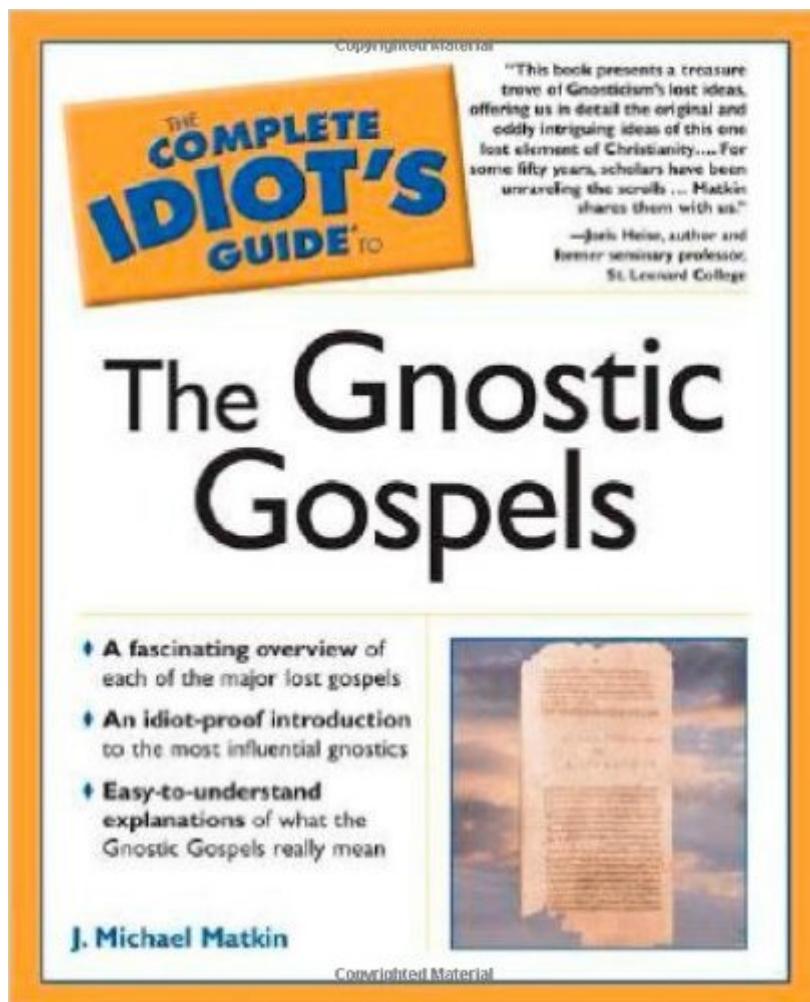


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The Complete Idiot's Guide To The Gnostic Gospels (Complete Idiot's Guides (Lifestyle Paperback))



Synopsis

The birth of the Christian Church and what it means for modern religion and philosophy. This engaging guide presents an accessible overview of the birth of the Christian church, using the historical works found at the famous Nag Hammadi site in Egypt. With chapters discussing each of the major and minor documents found at Nag Hammadi, this volume also includes an overview of Gnosticism and the major players, revealing not only what the texts say, but also what they mean. -Renewed interest in Gnosticism and the Gnostic gospels is driven by interest in the Nag Hammadi documents, The DaVinci Code, the Matrix movies, the Kabbalah, renewed interest in the divine feminine ideal, and the fact that many who've left the Church are looking for new answers in the early church -Author is a scholar and expert who's studied with some of the top people in the field

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I like to make up my own mind about things, and I knew early on in my life I'd one day read the so-called "Gnostic Gospels". What fanned the fires of my curiosity were all the occasions as I was growing up when my teachers in religious school would tell us there was "nothing of any value" in those books, and that was why the Church excluded them from its canon. So, naturally, I gravitated toward this pseudo-forbidden reading list. The Gnostic Gospels tell stories that are at once familiar to those modern individuals who have some background in the books included in the Bible, but there is

also a lot that represents challenges to the supposed accepted version of Biblical events. After poking around over the years in the subject of the Gnostic writings, I found little of deep interest there and moved on to other areas. When I happened across this Idiot's Guide to the topic, I pounced on it and found it to be a fine overview that could teach almost anyone about these writings that date to some of the earliest decades of Christianity. Are the Gnostic Gospels valid? If the question is "are they authentic?" then the answer would be yes. They are writings from antiquity. They contain many of the same figures from Sunday School classes and offer plenty of good-natured parables and anecdotes, histories and grains of hard-won wisdom. They, do, however, at times offer claims that stand in direct contradiction to much of what is taught as ecclesiastical truth in nearly all present-day branches of the Christian faith. Who is right? Who knows. Is that even really important? I found this Guide to be colloquial, authored by contributors with solid knowledge of the field, and it informed me about probably all I need to know regarding this subject, whether or not I ever again go on to read the actual Gnostic works.

In addition to details on individual Nag Hammadi texts as well as some other Gnostic texts, Matkin presents keys players within early Christianity on the orthodox and on the gnostic side. He also discusses those early times, later gnostic movements, and modern interests in gnosticism. The book is nicely chunked: twenty chapters each divided into sections and subsections that makes it easy to finish one piece, put the book down, and return to it later so as not to be overwhelmed by all the complex mythologies of the Gnostics. Matkin steers a middle road, neither a proponent of Gnosticism nor eager to dismiss it. While acknowledging Elaine Pagel's contribution to making the early Gnostics accessible, he doesn't refrain from criticizing her. While open to what made the Gnostics tick, he presents critics. For example, he includes the comment of Frederica Mathewes-Green, an Eastern Orthodox writer, that Gnostic schemes to directly experience God were "so wacky". The one real problem I face after reading this book is that it leaves me with no excuse not to read the Nag Hammadi texts again themselves (*The Nag Hammadi Library*) which, without Matkin's guidance, may overwhelm me, as they did the first time I read them. Even the second time I read them (in 2005), I can see now I missed a lot due to less preparation. I am rereading Matkin's summary of each Nag Hammadi text as I read the texts themselves. Along with other background reading in Gnosticism, Matkin has prepared me for what I hope to be a really inspiring reading of the *Nag Hammadi Library*. So I am grateful to Matkin for his efforts and delivery.

If you are looking for a great book to understand the who what when where and why about these

gospels, this is a good book for you. If you're needing a Cliffsnotes version of what goes on in the books and what they could be alluding to, this is NOT the book for you. But, I found the research good, intelligent and at times, humorous. This is a great read if you are curious about the gnostic gospels and want to know more, in a general sense, about what the gnostics were all about.

At last the heretics, the Gnostics can talk for themselves. They had been framed by the dominant church as outcasts. Up until 1945 and in English after translation in 1977, we had only the contemptuous reviews from the church fathers who were branding them as outsiders. They now can speak for themselves. The Idiots Guide to Gnosticism is a quick overview of the topic but without any understanding of Spiritual Myth being explained in any academic depth. The treatment indicates that the authors do not understand the mythological tradition which reaches back into antiquity. The Gnostics are a Christian manifestation of this tradition and did form the majority expression of Christianity in the early church. Literalism was imposed for authority and control to the original mystical expression of faith in the second century. There appears a bias in the book towards literalism and a disdain for the mystical, spiritual approach to Christian understanding. It also demonstrates a bias toward fundamentalist Christianity which doesn't understand the importance of ritual and sacrament which were central to the Gnostics as well as for the original Catholic church. If you are truly searching for an understanding of this forgotten and suppressed branch of Christianity, don't depend on this book to assist you in learning about the depth of Gnosticism. Its treatment of the subject is superficial, non academic and biased. Its writing style continues to mock the suppressed group and leaves the reader with an impression that the dominant church was correct in its suppression of this group which valued woman and men as equal, both in leadership and as persons who didn't have to live their lives in shame due to a doctrine of "Original Sin".

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