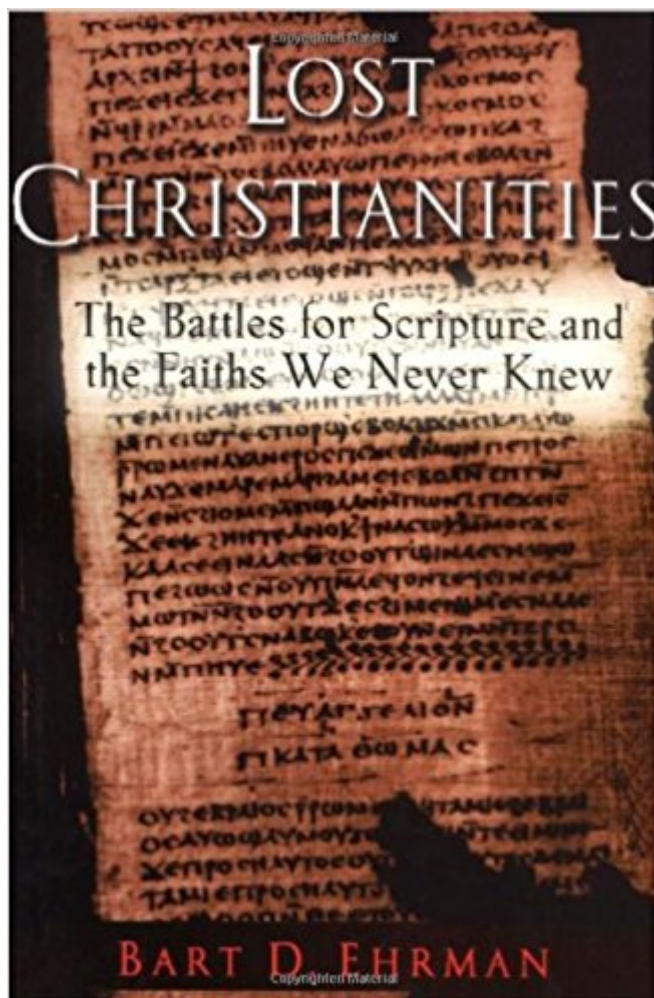


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The Lost Christianities: The Battles For Scripture And The Faiths We Never Knew



Synopsis

The early Christian Church was a chaos of contending beliefs. Some groups of Christians claimed that there was not one God but two or twelve or thirty. Some believed that the world had not been created by God but by a lesser, ignorant deity. Certain sects maintained that Jesus was human but not divine, while others said he was divine but not human. In *Lost Christianities*, Bart D. Ehrman offers a fascinating look at these early forms of Christianity and shows how they came to be suppressed, reformed, or forgotten. All of these groups insisted that they upheld the teachings of Jesus and his apostles, and they all possessed writings that bore out their claims, books reputedly produced by Jesus's own followers. Modern archaeological work has recovered a number of key texts, and as Ehrman shows, these spectacular discoveries reveal religious diversity that says much about the ways in which history gets written by the winners. Ehrman's discussion ranges from considerations of various "lost scriptures"--including forged gospels supposedly written by Simon Peter, Jesus's closest disciple, and Judas Thomas, Jesus's alleged twin brother--to the disparate beliefs of such groups as the Jewish-Christian Ebionites, the anti-Jewish Marcionites, and various "Gnostic" sects. Ehrman examines in depth the battles that raged between "proto-orthodox Christians"--those who eventually compiled the canonical books of the New Testament and standardized Christian belief--and the groups they denounced as heretics and ultimately overcame. Scrupulously researched and lucidly written, *Lost Christianities* is an eye-opening account of politics, power, and the clash of ideas among Christians in the decades before one group came to see its views prevail.

Book Information

Hardcover: 320 pages

Publisher: Oxford University Press (October 2, 2003)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0195141830

ISBN-13: 978-0195141832

Product Dimensions: 9.5 x 1 x 6.2 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.4 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.4 out of 5 stars 241 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #329,925 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #83 in [Books > Christian Books & Bibles > Bible Study & Reference > Additional Texts > Apocrypha & Pseudepigrapha](#) #572 in [Books > Christian Books & Bibles > Bible Study & Reference > Criticism & Interpretation > New](#)

Customer Reviews

What if Marcion's canon-which consisted only of Luke's Gospel and Paul's letters, entirely omitting the Old Testament-had become Christianity's canon? What if the Ebionites-who believed Jesus was completely human and not divine-had ruled the day as the Orthodox Christian party? What if various early Christian writings, such as the Gospel of Thomas or the Secret Gospel of Mark, had been allowed into the canonical New Testament? Ehrman (*The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture*), a professor of religion at UNC Chapel Hill, offers answers to these and other questions in this book, which rehearses the now-familiar story of the tremendous diversity of early Christianity and its eventual suppression by a powerful "proto-orthodox" faction. The proto-orthodox Christians won out over many other groups, and bequeathed to us the four Gospels, a church hierarchy, a set of practices and beliefs, and doctrines such as the Trinity. Ehrman eloquently characterizes some of the movements and Scriptures that were lost, such as the Ebionites and the Secret Gospel of Mark, as he outlines the many strands of Christianity that competed for attention in the second and third centuries. He issues an important reminder that there was no such thing as a monolithic Christian orthodoxy before the fourth century. While Ehrman sometimes raises interesting questions (e.g., are Paul's writings sympathetic to women?), his book covers territory already well-explored by others (Gregory Riley, *The River of God*; Elaine Pagels, *Beyond Belief*), generating few fresh or provocative insights. Copyright 2003 Reed Business Information, Inc.

"A charting of the full theological kaleidoscope would take volumes, but it is possible, using Ehrman's book as a jumping-off point, to examine some of the more striking and widespread of the Christian roads not taken."--Time Magazine (cover story)"A well-crafted, scholarly tale of forgeries, burned books, doctrinal feuds, and other episodes in the making of the New Testament and the early Church. Or better, Churches."--Kirkus Reviews"Ehrman's style is marked by the narrative thrust of a good story or even a sermon."--Christian Science Monitor"This book offers a fascinating introduction to an astonishing range of 'lost Christianities' that flourished at the time when the Christian movement began. Bart Ehrman has the rare gift of communicating scholarship in writing that is lively, enjoyable, and accessible."--Elaine Pagels, Princeton University"That Ehrman makes his case without pushing into territory considered heretical by many mainstream Christians shows a deft touch with the most volatile of subjects.... Will shock more than a few lay readers. The 27 New Testament gospels, epistles, acts, and revelations, it turns out, were only a handful of the letters,

arguments, visions, and accounts of Christ's life in wide circulation in the early centuries of the religion."--Scott Bernard Nelson, *The Boston Globe*"Ehrman displays expert knowledge of the texts and the best modern scholarship, as well as sound critical judgment about their content. His balanced exposition of the Gospel of Thomas, with its careful delineation of the different materials in it, is outstanding. His essay on the Secret Gospel of Mark, with its suggestion that the text may be a modern forgery (perhaps even by its learned editor, Morton Smith), reads like a detective story. Studying a text in *Lost Scriptures* and reading Ehrman's discussion of it can be both informative and engrossing."--*America*"The author of more than ten books on New Testament history and early Christian writings, Ehrman has established himself as an expert on early Christianity. These two works should soundly solidify his stature, as they illuminate the flavor and varieties of early Christian belief."--*Library Journal* (on *Lost Christianities* and *Lost Scriptures*)"A fascinating look at how Christianity was molded."--*Dallas Morning News*"Highly readable and based on up-to-date scholarship, Ehrman's book provides an excellent introduction to early Christianity's diversity and the means by which early orthodoxy, and the New Testament canon, developed from it. This lively study will prove eye-opening to a wide variety of readers."--Elizabeth A. Clark, John Carlisle Kilgo Professor, Duke University

An insightful read to anyone interested in religious studies of the Abrahamic faiths. A must have!

But boy, what terrible editing. Constantly flipping back and forth--topics not presented in a unified way. But a great introduction.

It's a good overview of the earliest church's wide range of theologies and beliefs. Also illustrates the self-promoting nature of some of the leaders.

I love history books, and I love religious books, this brings those two together well. Gives great historical and cultural details.

It arrived before expected and in very good shape. It was just as presented in the explanation of appearance/usage. The subject matter is very thought-provoking!

Really like this. Excellent bibliography for further review. Good starting point for understanding how the faith got its start. Casts absolutely no doubt on my beliefs...actually enhances the "mystery of

the faith".

This is a well written, clear argument that busts the modern myth that mainstream Christianity has always been mainstream. Early Christianity had many variations, conflicting doctrines, and unique scriptures that were mostly destroyed when mainstream Christianity destroyed competing views.

This is an extensive (yet not exhaustive) excellent overview of the wide variety of Gospels that were available after the death of Jesus : there were different interpretations on the life & death of Jesus and what it meant (hence a variety & sometimes contradictory Gospels). Some of the Gospels were authentic & others were forgeries, some were included in the New Testament & others excluded. The powers that be at the time (Constantinople & Roman Empire) decided on what is to be taught in the Church (hence the New Testament Gospels were chosen) & voting on the Divinity of Jesus (as some Gospels pronounced Jesus human & others Divine) and the Trinity of the Godhead. The Gospels that did not make it where banned & their followers driven underground. This is a great introductory read on Early Christianity and how it was crafted the way it was & why?

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