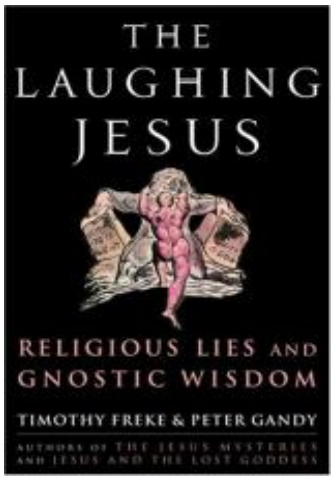
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# The Laughing Jesus

by Timothy Freke and Peter Gandy




## About the Book

Timothy Freke and Peter Gandy, authors of **The Jesus Mysteries** and **Jesus and the Lost Goddess**, return with a powerful indictment of Jewish, Christian, and Islamic fundamentalism and a passionate reinterpretation of Gnostic spirituality. According to Freke and Gandy, religiously inspired acts of violence, such as the attacks on 9/11, are nothing new. They are the continuation of a long and bloody history of brutality caused by mistaking bizarre old books for the Word of God. The time has come to end religious intolerance and wake up to oneness by rediscovering the Gnostic way of transforming oneself and the world.

Freke and Gandy's Incendiary New Book Is a Wake-Up Call to the World

What if the Old Testament is a work of fiction, Jesus never existed, and Muhammad was a mobster?

What if the Bible and the Qur'an are works of political propaganda created by Taliban-like fundamentalists to justify the sort of religious violence we are witnessing in the world today?

What if there is a big idea that could free us from the us-versus-them world created by religion and make it possible for us to truly love our neighbors --- and even our enemies?

What if it is possible to awaken to a profound state of oneness and love, which the Gnostic Christians symbolized by the enigmatic figure of the laughing Jesus?

Discover for Yourself Why the Gnostic Jesus Laughs

## Discussion Guide

**1.** The Nicean Creed, or Apostles' Creed as it is commonly known, forms the backbone of the belief system of most modern Christian churches and is repeated at every service. Look closely at the words of this statement of belief, and think about it in light of the story Freke and Gandy tell of its origins on page 78. What is your opinion of the men who composed these words? Does knowing this about their origin change the meaning of their repetition for you? Did you grow up repeating the Apostles Creed in church services? Why did you say these words? Did you believe them completely, or were you following along out of habit? Have you ever written your own statement of belief? If you did, what would it say?

*I believe in God, the Father Almighty,*
*the Creator of heaven and earth,*
*and in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord:*
*Who was conceived of the Holy Spirit,*
*born of the Virgin Mary,*
*suffered under Pontius Pilate,*
*was crucified, died, and was buried.*
*He descended into hell.*
*The third day He arose again from the dead.*
*He ascended into heaven*
*and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty,*
*whence He shall come to judge the living and the dead.*
*I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic church,*
*the communion of saints,*
*the forgiveness of sins,*
*the resurrection of the body,*
*and life everlasting.*
*Amen.*

**2.** Discuss the story of Muhammad as Freke and Gandy describe it. Does the image of Muhammad as a self-aggrandizing prophet making self-serving proclamations bring to mind any other famous prophets you have heard of? What are the dangers of prophecy? Do you think that the idea of a man speaking for God is inherently corrupt?

**3.** A common explanation for the current wave of Islamic fundamentalism that led to 9/11 and other recent atrocities is that the terrorists are perverting the true message of Islam, but Freke and Gandy contend that this is not the case. Do you agree with this?

**4.** The "spiritual supermarket" approach to belief is often criticized by Literalists. Why do you think this is? Why do we feel the need to search out and cling to one version of the truth? Is it inherent in human nature, or a product of years of Literalist teaching that has made this the way of the world? Do you feel that the spiritual supermarket is less valid than a single story that explains existence?

**5.** Discuss the two approaches to old and new that Freke and Gandy describe: the Literalist view that the old is holy and the new is heretical, and the Gnostic view, which is described by Carl Jung as, "All old truths want a new interpretation." Which makes sense to you?

**6.** On page 131, Freke and Gandy write: "Most people have experienced at least brief moments where they have found themselves catapulted into the mystery of the moment." Describe a moment in your own life when you experienced this flash of perspective that made you aware of the hugeness and mystery of existence.

**7.** What do you think of Freke and Gandy's answer to the big question of the meaning of life: the universal desire for all to feel good and enjoy life? Does this resonate for you? Why or why not?

**8.** In the Gnostic tradition, the journey to become more conscious is never-ending and Freke and Gandy tell us that the journey itself is the destination. Where do you see this way of thinking in other spiritual traditions?

**9.** On page 198, Freke and Gandy discuss the traditional images of the Literalist Christian God. What visions of God have you had through the years as your spirituality has developed?

**10.** Unconditional love is a theme that has made its way into many religious traditions. What do you find most difficult about this task? Where do you feel like you fall short and need to most focus your energy? Personal perfectionism? Dislike of other people? Accepting the whole of what life offers? Loving your enemies?

**11.** On page 202, Freke and Gandy question whether Literalist Christians are unfit to deliver justice because of their unquestioning belief in the Jesus fable. Do you think this is the case? What is your opinion of the intersection of faith and policy in the United States today? Is separation of church and state a possibility, given the advent of fundamentalism?

**12.** Gnosticism puts a good deal of emphasis on embracing duality: intuition and rational thought, good and evil, death and re-emergence, the "I" and the "it." Where do you see this concept in the teachings of traditional religions? Where do you find an absence of acceptance of duality?

**13.** Faith (as defined by Freke and Gandy as irrational belief in the face of the unknown) is the cornerstone of Literalist religion. Freke and Gandy redefine faith in a Gnostic context as "pronoia." In what ways do you feel this is different than blind belief? Do you think we can live without some faith in our lives? What does the Literalist version of faith give people, and how else can we fill this need?

**14.** Faith (as defined by Freke and Gandy as irrational belief in the face of the unknown) is the cornerstone of Literalist religion. Freke and Gandy redefine faith in a Gnostic context as "pronoia." In what ways do you feel this is different than blind belief? Do you think we can live without some faith in our lives? What does the Literalist version of faith give people, and how else can we fill this need?

**15.** Describe the image of the laughing Jesus?what does this mean to you? Why does this image resonate so strongly with Gnostics? What message does it portray?

**16.** What other stories from the New Testament can you recall that can be interpreted in a Gnostic context?

## Author Bio

Timothy Freke has an honors degree in philosophy and is the author of more than twenty books on world spirituality. He lectures and runs experiential seminars throughout the world exploring gnosis.

## Critical Praise

"**The Laughing Jesus** should be considered not merely a good read, although it is, but also a matter of burning urgency, for this is one of the most important books that has emerged in this infant millennium."

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