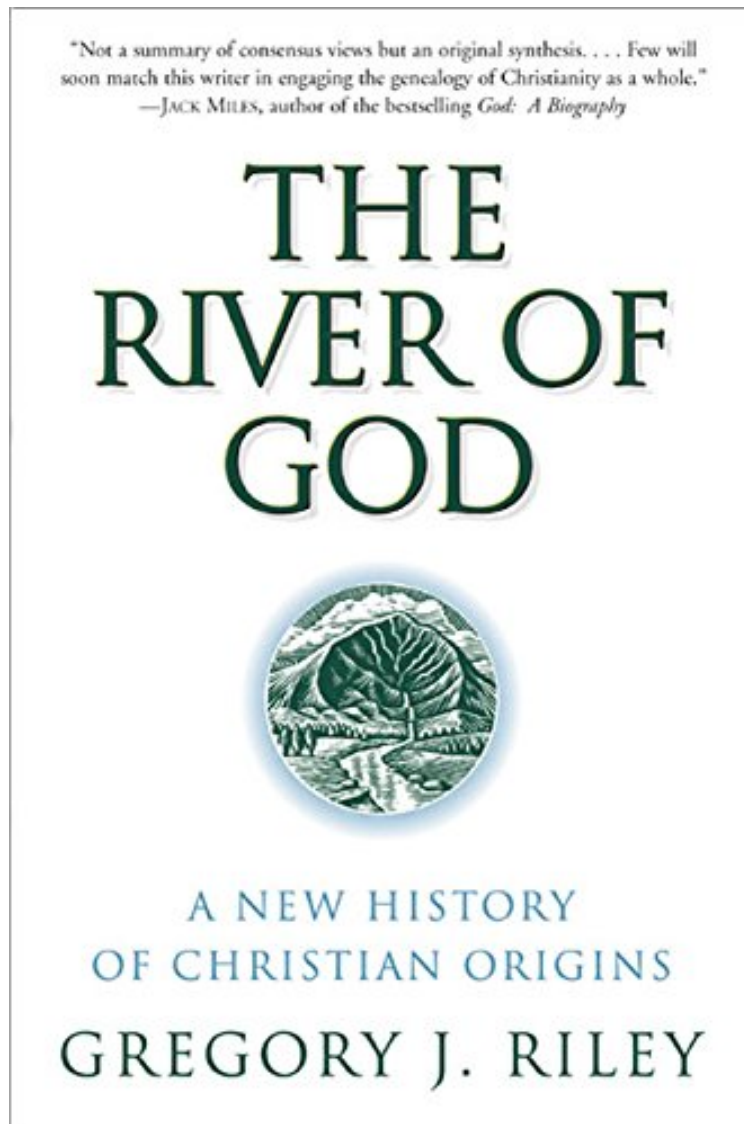


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River of God, The: A New History of Christian Origins

Gregory J. Riley

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Gregory J. Riley : River of God, The: A New History of Christian Origins before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised River of God, The: A New History of Christian Origins:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Excellent critical study.By CustomerFun learning experience. There is always more than appears on the surface.2 of 4 people found the following review helpful. Interesting readBy southernSaraRead this for World Religions course, and it was pretty good. Interesting history of different religions and their connections to Christianity. Author does not insult any beliefs, which was nice.3 of 8 people found the following review helpful. Worth every dimeBy MarkThe River of God is yet another great book by Dr. Riley. Riley is one of the

foremost New Testament scholars living today. Riley brings a educated perspective that most NT scholars don't have. There are a lot of reviews here into the details of the RIVER of God so I don't see the need to go into more details, but realize this: reading this book will help you understand how Christianity has developed over the years. Riley, is a Christian and a scholar. Because of this his unique insight is way beyond most of the dribble out there today.

Where did Christianity come from? Acclaimed author Gregory Riley embarks on a remarkable journey in this readable and persuasive account of the origins of Christianity. Riley demonstrates that early Christians held widely differing beliefs about God, Jesus, the Devil, and the human soul, and follows these beliefs back to their sources in Greek science and philosophy and the religions of the ancient Middle East. An expert on the context in which Christianity arose, Riley maps out a new understanding of the forging of Christianity, and conveys a vital message for today about the true nature of Christian faith as inherently diverse.

.com Believing in Jesus means so many different things to so many people that it's difficult, if not impossible, to define the true essence of Christianity. The differences between a charismatic Baptist hymnal, for instance, and a high-church Anglican communion merely scratch the surface of the many varieties of Christian belief. The River of God reminds readers that Christian belief has always been wildly diverse, and that Christianity was preceded and informed by many ancient cultural traditions. This is the point made by author Gregory J. Riley, professor of New Testament and Early Christianity at the Claremont School of Theology in California and the author of *One Jesus, Many Christs*. Riley's prose is mostly uncomplicated, and his metaphorical argument is fairly clear: many cultural streams converged to form the river of God, and material from those streams built up the delta of Christianity. But this book is not, as its subtitle claims, "A New History of Christian Origins." It is primarily a reworking of a familiar and amply documented fact, made popular by the work of Elaine Pagels and Jack Miles, among others: Christianity did not spring into being independent from its cultural context. Like life, it evolved, and continues to evolve. Though not original, Riley's point does bear repeating. Its repetition cultivates Christian humility, by helping to remind us that everyone in history who has ever learned to live well--including, or perhaps especially, Jesus--has learned largely by paying attention to the world around him. --Michael Joseph Gross
From Publishers Weekly
In what is now a rather commonplace argument, Riley (*One Jesus, Many Christs*) contends that Christianity originated from the tremendous theological diversity of Near Eastern religions and that its origins cannot be explained or understood adequately by simply emphasizing its roots in Judaism, as he claims conventional scholarship has done. He proposes instead a threefold model of genealogy, punctuated equilibrium and the "river of God" to investigate Christian origins. First, he examines Christianity's genealogy, examining all the branches of its family tree to locate the sources of ideas such as the Devil, body and soul, and monotheism. Second, he argues that Christianity evolved by embracing certain ideas that would ensure its survival and rejecting others that did not contribute to its longevity. Finally, in an unoriginal manner, Riley uses the image of a river to demonstrate the diversity of religious traditions that have flowed into Christianity as well as the variety of traditions that have developed within Christianity itself. But Riley's book is plagued with problems. His subtitle is misleading, for he doesn't offer a new history of Christian origins; acknowledging and emphasizing the religious diversity upon which Christianity depended has been a standard approach for more than a decade. Riley also passes along some inaccuracies. Plato never equated the Good with God, and Aristotle probably would be horrified to learn that his Unmoved Mover is God. Riley's pedestrian prose and lack of originality combine to steal the zest from what otherwise could have been an exciting book. Copyright 2001 Cahners Business Information, Inc.
From Library Journal
Several recent books have sought to demonstrate the influence of Greek and Roman thought on the origins of Christianity, but Riley (*New Testament and Early Christianity*, Claremont Sch. of Theology) gives us one of the best. His arguments are far more balanced and substantiated than those in Timothy Freke and Peter Gandy's *The Jesus Mysteries* (LJ 7/00), for example. Riley states that Christianity was not produced by preceding and/or contemporaneous religious ideas, which he calls "the river of God." However, he points out that for Jesus and his disciples there was "a vast store of ideas and traditions that they used to form their unique expressions of religious truth." Beginning with a discussion of why the "Israel only" model (i.e., the idea that Christianity drew only from Judaism) is incorrect and insufficient, he moves in subsequent chapters to discuss the sources for and ideas about such core concepts as one God, the Devil, the soul as separate from the body, and the need for a Savior. His last chapter contains his summary of how Greek and Roman religious ideas affected Christianity and how recognizing this can lead to a more complete understanding of Jesus and his message. This volume will become one of the most important books on the subject. Recommended for any public or academic library. David Bourquin, California State Univ., San Bernardino Copyright 2001 Reed Business Information, Inc.