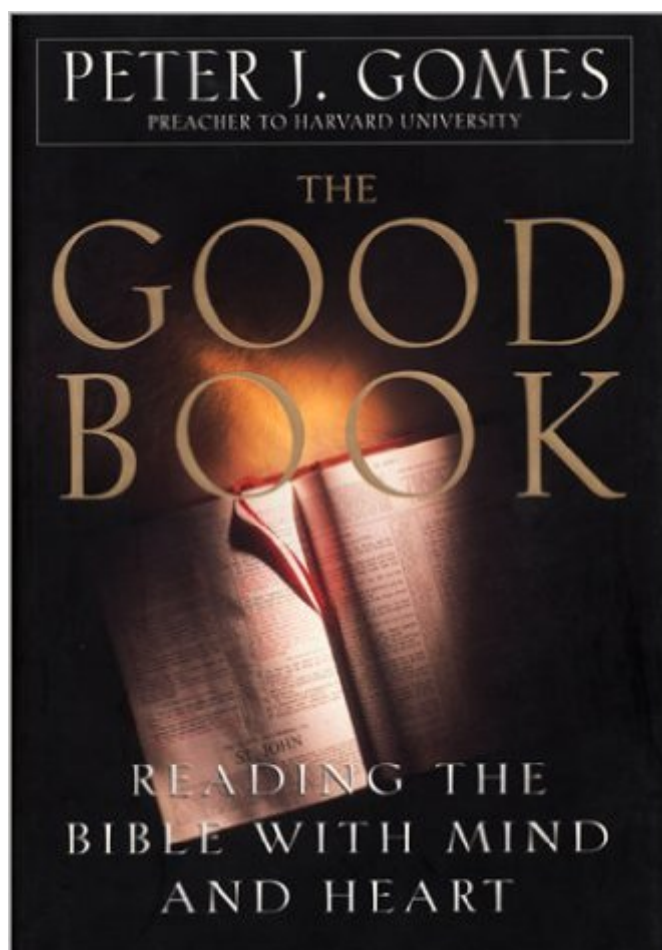


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The Good Book: Reading The Bible With Mind And Heart



Synopsis

Why are so many intelligent and compassionate people embarrassed to say they find wisdom and comfort in the Bible? Why do so many seekers turn to New Age religions instead of the Bible? And how as a society did we come to cede biblical interpretation to those who would use the Bible as a tool for division and exclusion? In this groundbreaking book, Peter Gomes shows how to read the Bible and what it says about the topics that concern us all, including joy suffering, evil, and goodness. He also explains what the Bible really says about women, gays and lesbians, and people of color. With compassion, humor, and insight, he gives readers the tools and understanding they need to make the ancient wisdom of the Bible a dynamic part of their modern lives.

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Customer Reviews

I tend to like books whose ratings vacillate between five stars and one. Clearly some readers get it and some don't. The Bible has been used for centuries as an excuse for slavery, for bigotry, for war, for torture, for anti-Semitism, for homophobia, and for misogyny. It has been used as a crutch for those emotionally immature enough to need to feel right and morally superior. The people who would use the Bible in this way--and they continue to flourish and proliferate--will probably have little use for Gomes's impressive volume, and so be it. For the rest of us, however, The Good Book is worthwhile and enriching. It illuminates the Bible for both the veteran churchgoer and the uninitiated. In teaching Sunday school and Confirmation classes for the Episcopal Church and in delivering funeral and wedding sermons, I have drawn on Gomes's book again and again to help convey the Christian message. Anyone interested in reading the Bible with "mind and heart" will find The Good

Book to be a good read.

My wife read this book aloud to me cover to cover on our commutes to church. She bought it because she is black and an Episcopalian and wanted to see what a black Episcopalian bishop had to say about the Bible. We found Gomes writing to be clear, well reasoned, and very non judgemental. My wife knows many Jews and got a lot out of the chapter that refuted Biblical arguments for Anti-Semitism, as did I. We especially got a lot out of the chapter on the refutation of Biblical justifications for slavery, as I am white, and our marriage would have been illegal 50 years ago in many states. We found Gomes rebuttal of the sinfulness of homosexuality to be very balanced and informed and were a little surprised when he bravely admits to being gay. Overall, The Good Book opened our eyes to the fact that the Bible is a great source of understanding God as a peaceful and loving God. We are no longer scared of reading the Bible anymore.

Those who have never had the unique privilege of hearing Rev. Gomes preach will most enjoy and benefit from this book, for the book memorializes the singular virtues of his ministry: his delightful use of language, the great clarity of his thinking, the openness of his mind, and his general resistance to ideology and dogma. As a book targeted to a general audience, it is not as comprehensive nor as successful at handling intellectual complexities and contradictions as a more scholarly tome might be. Too often, Rev. Gomes makes interpretive leaps which are perhaps not supported adequately by his arguments and marshalling of evidence. However, it must be said that any book of this ilk would necessarily be guilty of similar "sins." In any event, Rev. Gomes does not intend for his book to be yet another addition to the library of general Biblical scholarship. Instead, he succeeds at his primary objective, which is to breathe life into the reader's relationship with the book and to rescue the Bible from individuals on points of the political spectrum who brazenly manipulate its complex and elusive message to support their own particular points of view. A thought-provoking and surprisingly easy read.

I was someone who had studied the Bible (on an lay level) mainly for historical interest. My past encounters with fundamentalism had turned me off to trying to find spiritual inspiration from much of the Bible. This book helped me see that one does not have to turn the Bible into a religious idol in order to gain spiritual nourishment from it. It also placed into context some of the more confusing laws and holiness codes from the Pentateuch. In short, Professor Gomes has helped me reclaim much of the good from my Christian heritage.

This work by the preacher to Harvard University would have been unnecessary if he was not gay, black, and a Republican. These credentials alone suggest that he might have something different to say about how Americans interpret the Bible. And, in this regard, Rev. Gomes' book does not disappoint. Gomes' aim with this book seems to have been to help recover the original "voice" of the Bible. His concern, as has been the concern of many before him, is to let the Bible speak for itself rather than through the interlocutors of its many and varied readers. Reclaiming this more authentic voice, he contends, is necessary if we are to rescue the Bible from the hands of those who mistakenly use it to advance their own prejudices and agenda. His particular concern is with those who use the Bible to further circumscribe the freedoms of women, blacks, and homosexuals. But in the course of his defense, he also does a creditable job of rescuing the Bible from others who in one way or another have misunderstood its essential nature. You may not agree with his conclusions, but you will appreciate Rev. Gomes' fresh new look at some familiar passages of Scripture. Intended for the layman, The Good Book also is worthwhile reading for anyone interested in the Bible and its interpretation.

As a former pastor and now professor of religion in the Bible-belt, I found Gomes' reflections to be heart-warming and encouraging. In a culture where the Bible is often used to support exclusion and condemnation, Gomes presents the biblical message of inclusion. In a religious climate where the Bible is frequently literalized and idolized, Gomes presents the Bible as a "living text," the spirit of which transcends human attempts to place truth in a box. I found his writing at once stimulating and familiar. It was familiar in at least two ways: 1) his message is consistent with the spirit of the Bible and 2) I repeatedly found myself thinking, "I wish I had said that!" Gomes' content and writing style are readily accessible to the general reader. This volume is a "must read" for anyone interested in interpreting the Bible in the contemporary context.

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