...
and it was taken to mean that they were given moral freedom. And the capacity to make moral
choices was enormously valued.

MOYERS: Even choosing to disobey God is a moral choice.

PAGELS: Yes. But also choosing to transcend passion. That is, the choice to say no to natural
instincts. I mean, in the movement that Jesus and Paul initiated, for many celibacy was con-
sidered to be a preferable life, if not the only life, and one for the sake of the Kingdom of God
was a good choice. And it wasn't so much that the passions were evil — I think certainly you
don't see that in the sayings of Jesus or Paul — but that other things were more important.

MOYERS: Other things being?

PAGELS: Human moral freedom and working for the Kingdom of God and sort of a trans-
formed vision of human nature. And it had to do, as I began to see it, with human nature that was
not bound to the old structures of the family, or the society. That is, if you're a traditionally-
mined Jew or Roman or Greek, your moral obligation, or my moral obligation, would be to our
families, you know; to marry properly, to bring up a family, to transmit property. To be loyal to
the country and the nation and all of that. And Jesus' message in many ways was radical, you
know. Leave your family—

MOYERS: Follow me.

PAGELS: —leave your wife, husband, children, father and mother, you know. Follow me. It's
a very radical message. When one senses a kind of urgency, a conviction that the Kingdom of
God is coming, one has to radically transform human life. And it was then that expectation that
the end of time was coming soon receded that most people, most Christians, most people in that
movement reverted back to normal family life, and others, trying to maintain the austerity and
the challenge and the excitement of those austere and powerful sayings, followed a monastic
path.

MOYERS: Wasn't it also true that the church, under Augustine, began to believe that because
we were corrupted by birth, because we came into the world poisoned by original sin, we were
not capable of self-government. And therefore we needed both the authority of the church and
the state in order to govern our appetites, to check our instincts, to regulate our behavior?

PAGELS: Exactly. That's what surprised me so much when I was looking at the sort of pre-
Augustinian Christian church, that when they talked about Adam and Eve, they saw this as a
story about moral freedom, about human freedom in every form. Freedom from one's family and
obligations, and freedom from passions and freedom from the Gods and freedom from the gov-
ernment. You know, freedom to master one's self. And with Augustine it changed completely,
and he began to talk about a story of world bondage.

MOYERS: Bondage.

PAGELS: That Adam may have been free way back then, way back in the Garden, but he lost
it, you know. He lost it so far back that no human being since Adam or Eve has ever been free
morally in the way that he was. And that we were tainted by his misuse of freedom. And
Augustine then developed an ingenious theory, if you like this sort of thing, that this moral dis-
ease that Adam generated, so he thought, was sexually transmitted. It was transmitted through
semen, as he describes it. And that's why he says Jesus was the only person not infected, if you
like, because He was presumably conceived without human semen. But the rest of us conceived
in the usual depraved way, were infected morally by Adam's sin. And so this kind of moral
problem that he felt was endemic to our condition is described in sexual terms.

MOYERS: And everyone thereafter was born with a fallen nature because we have been cor-
ruped by the sexual act, right?

PAGELS: That's right. By the very process through which we're conceived. But as you say, I
began to see this time around when I looked at this story that that is more than a psychological or
theological statement. It also becomes a political statement. Because if you believe that, say, you
and I are baptized Christians in the second century and therefore become moral, and achieve
what God gave in creation — which is moral capacity to govern ourselves — then you don't
really need an external government. You would think that now everyone could, each person
could rule himself or herself, and one wouldn't need external government.

But in the fifth century, with the Christianization of the Roman Empire, there came a new
theory of human nature, saying, "Aha, but you see, now we know that we're so corrupted that
one has to be ruled from outside." And that was a useful strategy, if you like, for both the

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church and the state to speak about the necessity of external control. And has been ever since.

MOYERS: And once this union of church and state took place it was convenient for both. The church had no sword with which to enforce its orthodoxy. The state had plenty of power, but also the state needed what the church could do for it, so you had this coupling of power and theology.

PAGELS: That’s right. For the first time, the Christian movement was no longer a persecuted sect, it was no longer a small enclave which regarded itself as a kind of island of purity against this ocean of corruption, which was the Roman Empire. Christians were everywhere. The Emperor was a Christian, many of his officials were. There was all kinds of, you know, what many regarded as corrupt official influence in the churches. And many people became aware that the kind of moral freedom that had been talked about earlier in the Christian movement wasn’t as simple as it looked anymore.

And a more pessimistic, dark view of human nature in its possibilities emerged in the fourth century and afterwards. I mean, if you look at Protestant theology since John Calvin, Martin Luther, which are based on Augustine, through the modern theologians, they talk about some deep flaw in human nature. They don’t talk so much about the need for government as some others do. But many people have held the pessimistic view that because we are so corrupted, we need governmental structures to prevent ourselves from tearing each other apart, devouring each other like fishes, as one Christian theologian said.

MOYERS: But what’s exciting to me about all of this is that while people still hold to the old story and try to give it new power, there are so many people who are also searching for a new story, who are trying to develop an affirmative theology based on human freedom, to replace the negative and pessimistic theology that grew out of the old tradition.

PAGELS: Well, even there, that surprised me. But that has been read in the Adam and Eve story in the early centuries, that affirmative story that you’re talking about.

MOYERS: That we were created in God’s image.

PAGELS: Right. But on the other hand, the story that interests me most is not Adam and Eve, but the story of the history of religion, of the history of western Religion. And then there’s eastern Religion. I mean, that is what interests me. How we have created these cultural traditions, how we relate to them, how we choose them, how they change.

There, there’s an enormous pluralism. You know, there’s an enormous range. I mean, most people, when they think of religion, think of whatever they were brought up with, or not brought up with. Looking at the exploration of the study of religion, whether it’s Buddhism, or Hinduism, Islam, tribal religions, whatever, opens up a human range which is far more exciting than any of them taken separately.

MOYERS: What does it say about us, this story of religion?

PAGELS: Well, it says that there are many different ways that human beings can interpret our experience. And different ways we shape and value the world, and articulate that value. And very different attitudes people have taken about death, or life, or sexuality, or power. All kinds of realities that we confront.

MOYERS: You didn’t find, when you went back in the early part of the church, you didn’t find that golden age where Christianity existed pure and simple.

PAGELS: I think most people who studied the early history of Christianity are doing what I was doing, they’re going back to find— they say, “Well, the Christianity around me is all these different denominations, they all say different things. But back there at the time of Jesus it was all very simple and very clear. Let’s go back and find out what it was like back there, and then try that.” I mean, almost every reform movement in Christianity has tried that.

And what I found when I went back there was that there was, in fact, a multiplicity of voices in the early Christian movement, just as there is today. In fact, it was very complex and multifaceted. And then I became fascinated with that. But what the beliefs are doesn’t interest me as much as the kind of issues that are raised. And simply that people engage in some way with these fundamental questions about how do you look at human nature, how do you understand our position in the universe.

MOYERS: But what do you see happening in our own culture? We’ve all heard the voices of the last several years, the conflicts within Christianity. It seems that religion is influencing our politics in ways that I would never have imagined it would have done. Do you find that?
MOVIES: But do you consider your current finances strong enough to purchase a house? Where do you plan to live in the future?

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MOVIES: You own a lot of the company stock. If you were to sell it, would you consider investing the proceeds in real estate?

MOVIES: Is there a possibility that you might consider purchasing a house in the near future?

MOVIES: Have you thought about how your financial situation might affect your ability to purchase a house in the future?

MOVIES: Do you feel that your current financial situation is strong enough to support the purchase of a house? If not, what steps are you considering to improve your financial situation?

MOVIES: In terms of future housing, do you have any plans or aspirations for the type of home you would like to own?

MOVIES: You've mentioned that you own a lot of the company stock. How important is it to you to maintain a strong financial position?

MOVIES: Considering your current financial situation, do you believe that now is the right time to purchase a house?

MOVIES: You mentioned that you are considering selling your home soon. How do you plan to invest the proceeds from the sale?

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