

*Desire of the Everlasting Hills*, by Thomas Cahill

reviewed by [Robert M. Grant](#) in the [February 16, 2000](#) issue

Thomas Cahill's title comes from Genesis 49:26. Though it is hard to see any reference to Jesus in that passage, it does come close to defining this book's tone. Cahill calls himself "a faithful but flawed Catholic." It is clear that he has thought vigorously about Jesus and is an enthusiastic and able student of his subject. Though he contradicts himself at times, he is clear and consistent when the substance matters. As he writes, "No one's thinking is so well wrought as to be without contradictions."

Like other such studies, this straightforward book begins with the Hellenistic and Roman worlds and the place of Judaism within them ("the people Jesus knew"), then turns to "the Jesus the apostles knew": the "cosmic Christ" of Paul and of "John the Visionary," the gentile Messiah of Luke, and the "Word made flesh" of John the evangelist. Cahill ends with a testament of faith and a consideration of the future.

But though the book's underlying structure is conventional, the way the author builds on it is deeply personal. Sometimes his statements seem a little strange from an historical point of view, as when he states that the "remains of Simon Peter's modest home may still be seen at Capernaum, or when he defends the authenticity of the Shroud of Turin. But a book without quirks would be dull, and it is good to read someone who refuses to take the "gospels" of Peter and Thomas seriously.

Cahill relies on an excellent group of New Testament scholars. He claims that "modern scripture scholarship, rising in nonsectarian, agnostic circles, has brought believers new riches." He also rightly argues that "the worldview of the Jews is the rock-solid promontory that supports Christian faith"--though of course one must ask, which Jewish worldview? The book ends with a moving appeal to the witness of the Community of Sant' Egidio in Trastevere.