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# The Gnostic Bible: Revised and Expanded Edition

*From Barnstone, Willis (EDT)/ Meyer, Marvin (EDT)*



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Gnosticism was a wide-ranging religious movement of the first millennium CE—with earlier antecedents and later flourishings—whose adherents sought salvation through knowledge and personal religious experience. Gnostic writings offer striking perspectives on both early Christian and non-Christian thought. For example, some gnostic texts suggest that god should be celebrated as both mother and father, and that self-knowledge is the supreme path to the divine. Only in the past fifty years has it become clear how far the gnostic influence spread in ancient and medieval religions—and what a marvelous body of scriptures it produced.

The selections gathered here, in poetic, readable translation, represent Jewish, Christian, Hermetic, Mandaean, Manichaean, Islamic, and Cathar expressions of gnostic spirituality. Their regions of origin include Egypt, the Greco-Roman world, the Middle East, Syria, Iraq, China, and France. Also included are introductions, notes, an extensive glossary, and a wealth of suggestions for further reading.



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## **Editorial Review**

### **Review**

"This book may well be the most comprehensive collection of gnostic materials ever gathered in one volume. What is clear from the sourcebook is the tremendous diversity of thought that exists under the 'gnostic' umbrella including Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Pagan, Zoroastrian, and Greco-Roman themes. A valuable resource for students and scholars."—*Publishers Weekly*

"The selection of texts ranges across two millennia and various cultures. Each work, some translated into English for the first time, is accompanied by a clear introduction and synopsis. This is an important sampler of relatively unknown spiritual literature."—*Library Journal*

"To read *The Gnostic Bible* is to witness something astonishing. . . . I read it with dizzy excitement."—Ian Cant, *Ascent Magazine*

"A Godsend for anyone interested in alternative Christianity, the history of Christianity, or spirituality in general."—*Turk's Head Review*

"An enormously rich collection of sources—a wonderful achievement!"—Elaine Pagels, author of *The Gnostic Gospels* and *Beyond Belief*

"Willis Barnstone and Marvin Meyer's *Gnostic Bible* joins Bentley Layton's *Gnostic Scriptures* as one of the true critical sourcebooks for gnostic texts. Here, from China to Catalonia, from the first to the fourteenth centuries, gnosticism is seen as a global meditation."—Harold Bloom, author of *Genius: A Mosaic*, *Hamlet: Poem Unlimited*, and *The Western Canon*

"I feel as if I had been waiting for this book all my life."—Carolyn Kizer, Pulitzer Prize-winning poet

"Everyone interested in the tumultuous origins of Christianity and in a mysticism of direct, unmediated communion with God should fall on this brilliant and ground-breaking book. In it, for the first time, are assembled all the major texts of gnosticism, with illuminating notes and introductions, and in translations that radiate clarity."—Andrew Harvey, author of *Sun at Midnight*, *Son of Man*, and *The Direct Path*

"These ancient texts have not lost any of their power to awaken higher consciousness. Seekers of knowledge owe an enormous debt to Barnstone and Meyer for presenting these works to us in a fresh, clear, and accessible form."—Richard Smoley, author of *Inner Christianity: A Guide to the Esoteric Tradition*

"In this wonderfully readable anthology the authors have brought together a large number of interesting selections from a wide chronological, geographical, and cultural range of traditions that nevertheless illustrate fascinating overlapping patterns in religious symbolism and worldviews."—Michael Williams, author of *Rethinking Gnosticism*

“These two wise men have written an amazing book—the best of its kind, ever. They bear lit matches in our dark tunnel—sometimes they are the matches themselves.”—Gerald Stern, author of *American Sonnets* and *What I Can't Bear Losing*

#### About the Author

Born in Lewiston, Maine, Willis Barnstone was educated at Bowdoin, Columbia, the Sorbonne, and Yale. He taught in Greece at the end of the civil war (1949–51), and in Buenos Aires during the Dirty War. During the Cultural Revolution he went to China where he was later a Fulbright Professor at Beijing Foreign Studies University (1984–85). Former O'Connor Professor of Greek at Colgate University, he is Distinguished Professor of Comparative Literature and Spanish at Indiana University.

His publications include *Modern European Poetry* (Bantam, 1967), *The Other Bible* (HarperCollins, 1984), *Poetics of Translation: History, Theory, Practice* (Yale, 1993), *Funny Ways of Staying Alive* (University Press of New England, 1993), *The Secret Reader: 501 Sonnets* (University Press of New England, 1996), the memoir *With Borges on an Ordinary Evening in Buenos Aires* (University of Illinois, 1993), *Algebra of Night: Selected Poems—1949–1998* (Sheep Meadow, 1999), *The Apocalypse* (New Directions, 2000), *Life Watch* (BOA Editions, 2003), *Border of a Dream: Poems of Antonio Machado* (Copper Canyon, 2003), and *The Gnostic Bible* (Shambhala Publications, 2003).

A Guggenheim Fellow, his awards include a National Endowment for the Arts award, a National Endowment for the Humanities award, an Emily Dickinson Award of the Poetry Society of America, a W. H. Auden Award of the New York State Council on the Arts, the Midland Authors Award, three Book of the Month Selections and four Pulitzer Prize nominations for poetry. His work has appeared in *American Poetry Review*, *Doubletake*, *Harper's*, *New York Review of Books*, *Poetry*, *Paris Review Poetry*, *Partisan Review*, the *New Yorker*, and the *Times Literary Supplement*.

Marvin Meyer, PhD, (1948–2012) was Grisct Professor of Bible and Christian Studies in the Department of Religious Studies at Chapman University in Orange, California. His books include *The Gospel of Thomas* and, with James Robinson, *The Nag Hammadi Scriptures*.

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