John Glyndwr HARRIS, *Gnosticism. Beliefs and Practices* (The Sussex Library of Religious Beliefs and Practices), Sussex Academic Press, Brighton - Portland 1999, pp. X+224.

This book leaves the impression that it has been written with enthusiasm for its theme. It is part of the series «The Sussex Library of Religious Beliefs and Practices», which includes books on all sorts of religions and religious themes, intended for students and for interested laypersons. In the first five chapters, the author presents the world of gnosticism, the origins and history of gnostic communities, the literary sources, gnostic beliefs and practices, and the relation between orthodoxy and heresy. In the two final chapters he pays special attention to some gnostic gospels and to

the *Gospel of John*. This book contains much information about the gnosis, transmitted both within and outside of the early Christian Church. It is made clear that this knowledge was about salvation of the soul and about the divine spark which exists in human beings. The author deals with the backgrounds of gnosticism in Persia, Hellenism, Judaism, and Christianity. He also pays attention to the Bogomils, the Cathars, Jacob Boehme, William Blake, and Carl Gustav Jung. The book has been written in a sympathetic tone, in spite of the polemics between Church Fathers and gnostics in the first centuries of the Christian era.

However, since this book is intended for students and for interested laypersons, I doubt whether for these readers gnosticism is presented clearly enough. The author considers gnosticism as a whole, although he is aware of the differences within this «movement». His comprehensive approach implies that in order to illustrate his discourse, he refers almost indiscriminately not only to acknowledged gnostic texts from Nag Hammadi, but also to the *Teachings of Silvanus*, to Clement of Alexandria, to Origen, to the Hermetic literature, and even to the *Epistle to the Hebrews*. If I were a student or a layman wanting to be initiated into the complicated matter of gnosticism, I am not sure whether the first chapters would give me the insight I was looking for. One who has been initiated into this field will recognize many themes; but the question is whether the presentation is didactically warranted for those who are still in the stage of getting acquainted with gnosticism. Moreover, the author bases his explanations not so much on recent publications on gnosticism as on older ones. For example, no distinction is made between Valentinus and later Valentinianism which, rightly or not, has been attributed to him; even if one does not agree with Markschies' study about Valentinus, it would be recommendable to inform the readers about his views. But since Harris' select bibliography includes only titles in English, it may be that the German language of Markschies' book was a barrier. To mention another recent author: M.A. Williams' provocative study on «rethinking gnosticism» is included in the bibliography, but its ideas are not reflected in the book itself.

Unfortunately, Harris' references to the gnostic and patristic sources are usually very vague, with no mention of the chapters or sections which have been introduced in modern editions and translations. Many references are even completely wrong, for example when a text from the *Gospel of Thomas* is confused with the *Gospel of Philip*, or with the *Apocryphon of John*, or when Valentinus is quoted according to the *Trimorphic Protennoia*, or according to the *Epistle to Rheginus*, whereas in fact Clements' *Excerpts from Theodotus* are quoted. Likewise, the *Gospel of Mary* is erroneously ranged among the Nag Hammadi books. And what to think of the repeated reference to Irenaeus, *Praefectio*, published in Oxford, undated, or about two works of Clement of Alexandria, *Stromateis* and *Miscellanies*, both published in London, undated? It is no disgrace to use only translations of Greek, Latin, and Coptic texts, but for a book which is intended, among others, for students at university it would be a good example to provide correct and complete references to the ancient sources, so that, in case the students' interest is aroused, they are enabled to find the primary sources themselves, albeit in translations. I conclude that this book is a scientific popularization, written with sympathy and enthusiasm, but unfortunately lacking the quality of books which can be recommended to students.

[Riemer Roukema]