

Gnosticism: origin and definition

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Gnosticism is a phenomenon widely investigated for several centuries. A great influence to study the phenomenon has come from the fortunate discovery and publication of the Nag Hammadi codices. Through these codices has been possible to study some of the texts written by the Gnostics themselves; previously we knew almost exclusively heresiological texts. Despite of the large number of publications devoted to the theme in the last decades, some basic questions regarding Gnosticism remain unanswered:

1. The definition of the term. Many scholars have wondered what is Gnosticism, whether it is possible to define it by this term or by other definitions. Some scholars have questioned the term "Gnosticism" and have considered it from a heresiological matrix and substantially derogatory. Others scholars have wondered what the Gnostics thought and how they defined themselves. Still others believe that the label "Gnosticism" is inadequate and that the different Gnostic groups may be related to other religious backgrounds (first of all to Christianity). There is also the issue whether there are particular characteristics to put those groups together around a conceptual definition of Gnosticism.

2. The origin of Gnosticism. The second problem, in relation to the previous one, concerns the origin of the phenomenon. Where, how and why Gnosticism was born: it is a question which gave rise, over the years, to a variety of responses. From Iranian to Jewish origin, through the Hellenization of Christianity: the proposals on the origin of Gnosticism were varied, but none has solved the problem in a sufficiently comprehensive and convincing manner.

3. The boundaries of Gnosticism. The two points refer us to a third one: which groups are related to Gnosticism and which are not. Starting from the existence of forms of pre-

Christian Gnosticism, up to the forms of the medieval dualisms and to Mandeism, various groups have been linked with 'classic' Gnosticism. In relation to its definition and its origin, it is possible to establish boundaries within which circumscribe Gnosticism.

CALL FOR PAPERS

This book aims to encourage scholars to respond these questions - after more than 40 years from the Conference held in Messina (U. Bianchi, *The Origins of Gnosticism/Le origini dello gnosticismo*, Colloquium of Messina, 13-18 April 1966, Leiden, E. J. Brill, 1967) which is still the reference point, positive or negative, of the matter. It thus calls to answer to the three items suggested.

The text of each paper should not exceed 12 pages of 2000 characters, excluding the bibliography.

The editor welcomes contributions in Italian, English, Spanish, German and French.

If you are interested in participating in the book, please answer me as soon as possible.

The deadline for submitting papers is October 1st 2012.

Papers should be sent to: a.cosentino@gmail.com. A fast publication can be assured.