Editor's Foreword

BAUR'S *DIE CHRISTLICHE GNOSIS* appeared from the same publisher (Osiander in Tübingen), and at the same time (June 1835), as David Friedrich Strauss's *Das Leben Jesu, kritisch gearbeitet*.[1] In fact a notice of Strauss's work is bound into the back of *Gnosis*. The furious controversy that immediately erupted over Strauss's critique of the gospel narratives[2] completely eclipsed his teacher's monumental study, and only gradually has it come out of the shadows and received the recognition it deserves. Baur published another book in 1835, *Die sogennanten Pastoralbriefe des Apostels Paulus*, which was as revolutionary in Pauline studies as *Die christliche Gnosis* was in the history and philosophy of religion. It demonstrated that Paul could not have been the author of the epistles to Timothy and Titus, and it anticipated Baur's later conclusion that only four epistles (Galatians, 1 and 2 Corinthians, and Romans) can be regarded as assuredly written by Paul.

Baur's interest in Gnosticism arose from his early studies in the history of religions, specifically his inaugural dissertation of 1827–28, which examined the idea of Christian Gnosticism and compared it with Schleiermacher's theology, and his 1831 monograph on the Manichean religious system.[3] But the specific motivation that led to the present book is the dispute that arose in the period 1832–34 between Baur and his colleague on the Catholic theological faculty, Johann Adam Möhler, over the doctrinal differences between Catholicism and Protestantism.[4] Möhler had argued in a lengthy

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1. See Volker Henning Drecoll, "Ferdinand Christian Baur's View of Christian Gnosis, and of the Philosophy of Religion in His Own Day," in *Ferdinand Christian Baur and the History of Early Christianity*, ed. Martin Bauspiess, Christof Landmesser, and David Lincicum; trans. Robert F. Brown and Peter C. Hodgson (Oxford, 2017), 116 n. 1. (The German original is *Ferdinand Christian Baur und die Geschichte des frühen Christentums* [Tübingen, 2014].) Drecoll's chapter (pp. 116–46) provides an excellent introduction to the book and helped motivate the translators to provide an English version.

2. For details see Ulrich Köpf's chapter on Baur and Strauss in *Baur and the History of Early Christianity*, 3–44, esp. 10–22. Strauss's book was translated into English by George Eliot in 1846 as *The Life of Jesus Critically Examined*.

3. *Primae Rationalismi et Supranaturalismi historiae*. Pars I. *De Gnosticorum Christiani ideali*. Pars II. *Comparatur Gnosticismus cum Schleiermacheriane theologiae indole* (Tübingen, 1827). *Das manichäische Religionssystem nach den Quellen neu untersucht und entwickelt* (Tübingen, 1831).

4. On this dispute see Notger Slenczka's chapter on Baur's interpretation of the Protestant principle in the controversy with Möhler, in *Baur and the History of Early Christianity*, 46–66. See also below,

treatise that Protestantism represents a Gnostic inward turn that rejects historical Christianity, and Baur had responded with an equally lengthy defense of Protestantism and its turn to the subject against false charges of subjectivism. Evidence suggests that *Die christliche Gnosis* was written very hastily in response to various pressures of publication and academic dispute. Baur was establishing himself as a New Testament scholar and as a historian of the Christian church and theology, so there was a lot on his plate in the mid-1830s.[5] The German text of *Gnosis* contains a number of flaws— typesetting mistakes, erroneous citations of primary sources, and the like—that are not recognized in the Errata at the end of the volume. The translation silently corrects these flaws wherever they were noticed, but has not attempted to verify the accuracy of Baur's citations of pagination in the secondary sources he discusses.

The work as a whole has an uneven quality. The section on Boehme (the least helpful part of the book) is largely a string of long quotations interspersed with brief interpretative comments. This is true of other sections as well, but to a lesser extent. Baur often directly quotes his sources, noting them but sometimes without providing quotation marks, a common practice at the time. His method of citations is erratic. Sometimes he uses footnotes, but at other times sources are indicated in-text. Sometimes he provides publication information, other times not. We have attempted to make the notation style more uniform and to provide more complete bibliographic information. Interspersed with Baur's notes are quite a few editorial notes, designated as [*Ed.*]. Brief editorial insertions are marked by square brackets, or in some instances italics. We have referred to existing English translations of ancient texts, using the abbreviations *ANF* to designate *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* and LCL to designate the Loeb Classical Library.[6] There are a few major headings in the text itself, but Baur introduced detailed headings into the table of contents. Some of these are sentences rather than normal headings. We have put all these headings into the text and have broken up the long paragraphs, which often run for several pages without a break. Baur sometimes adds lengthy footnotes in or near the end of a section, as though he has thought of more that needs to be said, and he even provides additions through the Index and the Errata. The work has the feel at some points of being made up as it goes along. In its original form it is difficult to read, and unfortunately a critical German edition of it has never been published.

Despite all of this, *Die christliche Gnosis* is a brilliant book and a true tour de force. It reveals Baur's remarkable grasp of the history of religions, the history of Christianity, the philosophy of religion, and philosophical theology, ranging from ancient sources

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Part 1, n. 51 and the following text.

5. *Die christliche Gnosis* completed the first phase of Baur's work, the religio-historical phase. In the next phase he turned to the history of doctrines and New Testament studies, and in the final phase he addressed church history. However, essays on all these topics appeared throughout his career.

6. *The Ante-Nicene Fathers: Translations of the Writings of the Fathers down to A.D. 325*, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, 10 vols. (Edinburgh, 1867–73); reprinted many times. *Loeb Classical Library* (Cambridge, MA, 1911–).

to the nineteenth century. This range is a hallmark of all his scholarship, and it is first revealed here. Despite a few earlier works, *Die christliche Gnosis* is Baur's first major scholarly presentation, and his first major engagement with the modern thinkers who deeply influenced him, Schelling, Schleiermacher, and especially Hegel. Hegel was the most recent, Baur having assimilated his ideas very quickly after the posthumous publication of Hegel's *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* in 1832. For these reasons, this book is foundational for Baur studies.

The word *gnosis* is written the same way in Greek, German, and English, and simply means "knowledge," especially religious knowledge or (esoteric) knowledge of spiritual truth. "Knowledge" in English comes from the same Indo-European root as *gnosis*, namely *ĝnō*. We capitalize the term in this translation because Baur uses it to refer not only to the concept of Gnosis but also to the movement known as Gnosticism (for which he also employs the term *Gnosticismus*). The more customary term for "knowledge" in German is *Wissen*, which (along with English "wise" and "wisdom") derives from a different root. *Wissen* forms the basis for *Wissenschaft*, which means scientific or scholarly knowledge. In Baur's day academic theology was regarded as a *Wissenschaft*, along with other human sciences (*Geisteswissenschaften*). Writing about the goal of Gnosis as "clear self-consciousness" (in the section on the Pseudo-Clementines), Baur says that Gnostic systems assumed an identity between being and knowing such that "being can only be for knowing, that it can only be 'being as thought and known.'"

As the subtitle of Baur's book indicates, his usage of the term Gnosis goes beyond ancient Gnosis to designate the concept of "Christian religious philosophy" (*christliche Religionsphilosophie*) in its historical development. The term *Religionsphilosophie* poses a problem for translators.[7] On the one hand it can refer to "philosophy of religion" in the sense of a philosophical analysis of the concepts and shapes of various religious traditions without the philosopher necessarily sharing any convictions with these traditions other than a recognition of their importance. This is the modus operandi of most current Anglo-American philosophy of religion. On the other hand, the term can apply to the work of a religious believer or sympathizer who uses philosophical concepts and methods to describe and/or construct the belief system of a specific religion—Christian religion (and its antecedents) in the case of *christliche Religionsphilosophie*—as well as to defend it against criticism. This practice might be called "religious philosophy" or "philosophical religion" or even "philosophical theology," and it is the one followed by Baur in this book. He also reads Schelling and Hegel as "religious philosophers," and he interprets Schleiermacher's *Der christliche Glaube* (*Christian Faith*) as containing a religio-philosophical aspect because it intends to be a *science* (*Wissenschaft*) of faith. When *Religionsphilosophie* occurs in the section on

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7. For a fuller discussion of this issue, see the Editor's Foreword to Baur's *Christianity and the Christian Church of the First Three Centuries*, ed. Peter C. Hodgson, trans. Robert F. Brown and Peter C. Hodgson (Eugene OR, 2019), xxi n. 24.

Hegel, we translate it as "philosophy of religion" because the reference is to what Hegel himself called *Philosophie der Religion* in his lectures on the topic and elsewhere. These distinctions are of course not hard and fast.

Gnosis as used by Baur involves a theory of *religious history* as well as of religious philosophy or philosophical theology. Religious history is concerned with the relations among three major forms of world religions: paganism, Judaism, and Christianity. Baur devotes a great deal of attention to this matter in Part 2 and offers a classification of the Gnostic systems based on how they construe the relationships. The first major form of Gnosis links Christianity closely to both Judaism and paganism, and includes the systems of Valentinus, the Ophites, Bardesanes, Saturninus, and Basilides (Part 2.1). The second major form separates Christianity from both Judaism and paganism, and is represented only by Marcion (Part 2.2). The third major form identifies Christianity with Judaism, and opposes both of them to paganism (Part 2.3). Baur finds a historical exemplar of the latter in the Pseudo-Clementine system (the *Recognitions* and the *Homilies*). Volker Henning Drecoll points out that this is a logical rather than a history-of-religions construction of religious history, and that a fourth major type is conceivable in which Christianity is linked to paganism while rejecting Judaism.[8] Baur can find no historical representation of this final form because a Christianity "reduced to the same level as paganism" would be a contradiction of the singular character of Christianity, and thus does not appear in the history of Gnosis (although aspects of it are present in Manicheanism).

There are two major drawbacks to Baur's theory of religious history. One of them is summarized by Drecoll, who explains that Baur's portrayal of Gnosis

> sets out from the concept and then goes on to classify the phenomena. Baur certainly does know his sources, and he develops his concept in such a way that he can order the phenomena accordingly. All the same, his procedure is altogether deductive. It would therefore be unthinkable for him to have a loose structure of categories based on common features, or even a "typological model," of gnosis . . . This procedure does not take into account the full spectrum of types of Gnosticism (nor, accordingly, the extensive new discoveries of the twentieth century, since Baur's definition of gnosis can seem no longer serviceable today).[9]

The logical character of Baur's typology is revealed when, in turning to his third type, he writes: "The self-advancing concept of Gnosis has not yet run through all the moments in the course of its development." He was convinced that logical patterns are displayed in historical events, but he analyzes the events (and writings) themselves in strictly empirical fashion. Religious history draws on philosophical and theological ideas at the macro level, but on the micro level it is historical-critical.

8. In his essay in *Baur and the History of Early Christianity* (n. 1), esp. 126. See below, Part 1, n. 83.

9. Ibid., 145. Baur acknowledges in his Preface that he does not cover all the branches of Gnosticism.

The other drawback concerns Baur's use of the category of "paganism" in his account of the historical trajectory of world religions, moving from paganism to Judaism to Christianity. This is in fact a very traditional typology going back to early Christianity.[10] The issue comes up in an interesting way when Baur offers a critique of Hegel's organization of religions in the second part of his *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*.[11] Hegel does not employ the category of "paganism" at all but speaks rather of "determinate religion" (*die bestimmte Religion*). In the edition of Hegel's *Philosophie der Religion* available to Baur, Determinate Religion is divided into two main parts: nature religion, which includes the religion of magic, Hinduism, and transitional religions (Persian and Egyptian); and the religion of spiritual individuality, which includes Judaism, Greek religion, and Roman religion. Baur by contrast wants to expand the category of nature religion to include all the so-called pagan (non-Judeo-Christian) religions, and to distinguish Judaism from them because it reorients divine mediation away from nature to history. Hegel finds a progression within Determinate Religion itself toward "spiritual individuality," including Greek religion as well as Judaism, each of which contributes important elements to Christianity. Roman religion is a retrogressive form of spirit and provides the immediate context for the birth of Christianity. Hegel's scheme is more innovative, but it relativizes Judaism; Baur's scheme is more traditional, but it requires use of the negative category "paganism," under which the majority of world religions are lumped. Both schemes are hierarchical, placing Christianity as the "absolute" or "consummate" religion at the top. The critical edition of Hegel's *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*[12] points out that Hegel was constantly experimenting with the organization of Determinate Religion and could never arrive at a satisfactory arrangement. In fact, his final effort in 1831 gave nature religion a very minor role and distinguished the Asian as well as Near Eastern religions from it—just the opposite of the direction advocated by Baur.

Baur's attitude is ambivalent in that, while using the negative category, he says that paganism has been given "a less restricted role" in the more recent philosophy of religion (Schelling and Hegel). "In paganism, nature is regarded as the mediatrix who envelops the spirit that, in the realm of nature, is rising to the stage of religion[13] but of course is cloaked with nature's veil woven from so many colorful images, while at the same time also graphically setting forth in this veil the models or typology of the

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10. See Part 1, n. 9.

11. This is found in a section called "assessment of Hegel's concept of paganism" (see Part 4, n. 185 and surrounding text).

12. See Part 4, n. 141. See the Editorial Introduction to vol. 2 of the ET of this edition, 88–89.

13. Already in Part 1 Baur says that in nature religion the absolute substance becomes subject and rises to consciousness of itself. See Part 1, n. 11. A few pages later he writes: It "is one and the same [absolute] spirit that mediates itself with itself, and comes to consciousness of itself, in all the pneumatic or spiritual beings, when they become conscious themselves that the life of the concrete individual is related to, and identical with, the highest principle of spiritual life. The task of Gnosis is to comprehend and explain this point."

gods." The epistemological mode of paganism is a way of seeing or perceiving things in nature (*Anschauung*). It is foundational for and is taken up into the reflective understanding (*reflectirender Verstand*) of Judaism and the reason (*Vernunft*) of Christianity. What remains externally related in nature becomes reflectively assimilated in Judaism and then through Christian rationality grasps the inner connection of things.

Part 3 of *Christian Gnosis* discusses the conflict of Gnosis with Neoplatonism and the teachings of the early church. Baur points out that this conflict played a decisive role in the historical development of Christian dogma, especially by Irenaeus and Tertullian, and that Clement of Alexandria was both a critic and a proponent of Christian Gnosticism. "Clement concurs with the Gnostics above all on the fact that there must be a Gnosis as knowledge of the absolute. Historical faith cannot suffice. Belief must be elevated to knowledge if Christianity is said to be the absolute religion." This Gnosis is not only theoretical but also serves as practical wisdom. At the beginning of Part 4, Baur provides a very brief survey of the role of Gnosis from Augustine to post-Reformation theology before arriving at more recent religious philosophy (Boehme to Hegel). We pass over these parts of his religious history.

"Gnosis," Baur writes, "is a matter of religious history (*Religionsgeschichte*) only inasmuch as it is at the same time religious philosophy (*Religionsphilosophie*), such that we gain a proper concept of the essence of Gnosis from the distinctive way in which these two elements and orientations—the historical and the philosophical aspects—have become intermixed in one totality." Our attention now turns to religious philosophy. In a key passage early in Part 1, on the concept of Gnosis, Baur writes:

> The philosophical perspective . . . catches sight of an organic whole in which one and the same living idea moves forward in its concrete configuration, through a series of forms and stages of development. In the idea of religion, all religions are one; they are related to it as appearance or form relates to essence, the concrete to the abstract, what mediates to what is immediate or unmediated. The entire history of religion is none other than the living concept of religion, unfolding and advancing itself and, in so doing, realizing itself . . . For the idea of religion, the history of religion is not merely the history of divine revelations, for these revelations are at the same time the process of development in which the eternal essence of deity itself goes forth from itself, manifests itself in a finite world and produces division with itself in order, through this manifestation and self-bifurcation, to return to eternal oneness with itself . . . Gnosis is the remarkable attempt to grasp nature and history, the entire course of the world, together with all that it comprises, as the series of moments in which absolute spirit objectifies itself and mediates itself with itself.

One should not be surprised that this concept of Gnosis, which can be extracted from its ancient history, is also strictly analogous to the most recent religious philosophy. Baur thus anticipates Part 4 of his book, where he takes up Jacob Boehme's

theosophy, Friedrich Schelling's philosophy of nature, Friedrich Schleiermacher's *Glaubenslehre*, and G. W. F. Hegel's philosophy of religion. Boehme's theosophy stands in the Protestant mystical tradition and is characterized by a duality of principles posited within the divine nature itself and carried over to the created world. It is still couched in mythic and symbolic categories, and Baur does not do much with it other than to quote long passages. His presentation of Schelling is rather brief and idiosyncratic, describing his relation to Boehme (as shown by his treatise *Of Human Freedom*, which also in part uses figurative terminology), his relation to Gnosticism (his concept of God as becoming, which involves identity, difference, and return), and his nature-spirit dualism.

Our interest in this final part focuses on its treatment of the relationship between Schleiermacher and Hegel, and the movement from the former to the latter. Schleiermacher emphatically insisted that his *Glaubenslehre* does not contain a philosophical grounding for Christian faith. Baur, however, begged to differ.

> While the contents of the Christian faith should hardly be based on philosophy, a *science* (*Wissenschaft*) of the Christian faith . . . can only be accomplished in a philosophical way by the use of philosophical methods and certain philosophical elements, those which theology takes up within itself and works with. But this scientific procedure is completely the same as the one we have already become specifically acquainted with as religious philosophy, in other words, Gnosis.

Schleiermacher's great work in dogmatic theology is not simply *Glaube* but *Glaubenslehre*, the doctrine of faith or teaching about faith. (*Glaubenslehre* is a shorthand expression used by Schleiermacher himself for *Der christliche Glaube*.) The "doctrine" part includes a theory about human subjectivity and how the objects of religious faith (such as God and Christ) are modifications of religious consciousness. Christian faith also requires Christian knowledge—knowledge of a *wissenschaftlich* character.

From what Baur says about Schleiermacher at the beginning of his treatment, we gain the impression that, despite their obvious differences in character and content, his own book, *Die christliche Gnosis*, is intended as a supplement to and corrective of *Der christliche Glaube*. This certainly comports with his view, expressed throughout this book and elsewhere, about how faith and knowledge, *pistis* and *gnosis*, are intrinsically connected.[14] As the Apostle Paul expressed it in First Corinthians, a knowledge (*gnosis*) that is not "puffed up" is a knowledge that is engaged in practices of love and is congruent with faith. At the same time it is a knowing by which faith in something

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14. See his discussion of First Corinthians in Part 1 and Clement of Alexandria in Parts 1 and 3. One of his clearest statements about the relationship of faith and knowledge is found in an article published a year after *Gnosis*, "Abgenöthigte Erklärung gegen einen Artikel der *Evangelischen Kirchenzeitung*," *Tübinger Zeitschrift für Theologie* (1836), no. 3, 179–232.

historically given is "raised up" to the true concept of what is given. Faith is based on subjective conviction or certainty, while knowledge provides rational backing for it.

As for the transition from Schleiermacher to Hegel, Baur is tracking his own intellectual journey when he writes that "Schleiermacher's subjective standpoint—that of an absolute feeling of dependence without an absolute that has objective content—involves of its own accord the necessity of proceeding on to the Hegelian standpoint of objectivity." If the feeling of dependence is "absolute," if it refers to an "absolute causality," the mind finds itself propelled toward this absolute itself. While Schleiermacher assumes that philosophy can have nothing to do with faith, "Hegel insists on nothing more emphatically than recognizing that it is philosophy's task to bring religion to the true concept of itself and to elevate faith to knowledge, since philosophy and religion coincide as one and religion's object, like that of philosophy, is the eternal truth in its own objectivity: the absolute, or God." Subjectivity and objectivity are unified when it is understood that the mind's journey to God is at the same time God's self-knowledge returning to itself—that finite and infinite spirit are connected in the act of knowing. This connection is what the figure of Christ is all about.

Hegel distinguishes three moments in the doctrine of Christ: the moment of history (a nonreligious perspective),[15] the moment of faith (a religious perspective), and the moment of knowledge (a philosophical perspective). Baur describes the transition to the philosophical (or "spiritual") perspective as follows:

> This faith [in Christ] must therefore now first be elevated to knowledge. The spiritual content must be raised up from the element of faith into the element of thinking consciousness, where it is no longer based on the historical account as of something past and done with, but instead becomes justified by philosophy or the concept, as truth existent in itself, as absolutely present reality. For the truth existent in itself is absolute spirit, God as triune, the identity of the human being with God.

Where Hegel is heading is summed up by Baur:

> From the standpoint of speculative thinking,[16] God's becoming human is no solitary, one-time, historical event. Instead it is an eternal determination of God's being in virtue of which, in time, he becomes human (in each individual human being) inasmuch as God is human from eternity. The finitude and the painful humiliation Christ suffered as God incarnate is something God endures as human in every age. The reconciliation Christ accomplished is his deed occurring in time. But God reconciles himself with himself eternally, and Christ's resurrection and ascension is none other than spirit's eternal return to itself and to its truth. As human, as the God-man, Christ is human being in its universality. Not a singular individual, he is instead the universal individual.

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15. See Part 4, n. 177.
16. On the meaning of the term "speculative," see Part 1, n. 41.

Baur, however, wants to descend from these abstract heights of speculation and "go once again to the lower sphere in which the difference between the historical and the ideal fittingly applies," that is, to the sphere where "Christ retains a standing and importance no one else can share with him." Here "Christ" refers to Jesus of Nazareth, the one who was believed to be the Christ. In accord with the usage of the day, it functions as a name as well as a title. Baur introduces a statement that establishes his own critical perspective on Hegel:

> Hegel's philosophy of religion regards Christ as God incarnate only as this relates to faith, and without speaking specifically about which objective features of Christ's appearing faith in him actually presupposes. But how would faith in Christ as God incarnate have been able to arise unless he was, in some way or other, what faith took him to be? In any case the necessary presupposition is that the truth existent in itself, the unity of the divine nature with human nature, had become concrete truth, become known self-consciously, for the first time in Christ, and had been expressed and taught by him as the truth. This is also therefore the distinctive prerogative or preeminence of Christ.

This statement raises the question as to who the historical Christ was and how he in fact was what faith took him to be. Baur himself investigated the teaching and activity of Jesus and established on that basis a connection between history and faith.[17] The idea and historical reality can never be completely identified in any single individual; rather the idea can fully actualize itself only in an infinite series of individuals. But the non-identity of the ideal and the real can be reduced to a minimum in a single individual, and this is in fact the case with the individual through whom the idea of divine-human unity enters into the consciousness of humanity at a specific point in time.[18] In this sense history provides a foundation for faith, but only faith can affirm that *God* is present in Christ.

Hegel recognized that the teachings and sayings of Jesus are couched in the language of faith and representation, not that of speculative knowledge, and it was Hegel who established the famous distinction between *Vorstellung* and *Begriff*, representation and concept. But only the *form* differs, not the *content.* The content concerns the oneness of divine and human spirit, and this is articulated by Christ in his own way, through teachings, parables about the kingdom of God, and his own messianic self-consciousness. Because the form differs, there must be a distinction between the historical Christ and the ideal Christ, but not, in Baur's view, a separation or disjunction. Baur summarizes his own view as well as that of Hegel when, in a section just preceding the conclusion to the book, he says that Christianity is the mediation of

17. See Baur's *Christianity and the Christian Church of the First Three Centuries* (n. 7), 21–35; and *Lectures on New Testament Theology*, ed. Peter C. Hodgson, trans. Robert F. Brown (Oxford, 2016), 94–128.

18. See the passage quoted in Part 4, n. 182, from Baur's *Die christliche Lehre von der Dreieinigkeit und Menschwerdung Gottes in ihrer geschichtlichen Entwicklung* (Tübingen, 1841–43), 3:998–99.

religious consciousness, not in the form of nature (paganism) or the theocratic state (Judaism), but as "the history and person of a single individual." However, "this single individual is at the same time the human being as such or in itself (*der Mensch an sich*)." Only Hegel's philosophy of religion can "make this connection between this form, the history and person of God incarnate as a single individual, and truth existent in itself." Thus Hegel's philosophy of religion must be distinguished from the docetic and dualistic tendencies that were everywhere present in ancient Gnosticism, especially in the system of Marcion.[19]

In his "Concluding Remarks" Baur says that "Christianity had to leave behind it all that is polytheistic and dualistic, the many different versions of the antithesis of spirit and matter, of a higher and a lower god, and the whole figurative, symbolic presentation of religious and speculative ideas." In place of all that it inherited from paganism and Judaism, "the idea of absolute spirit—which took shape in all these forms so as to manifest its own proper nature in them, and through this mediation to grasp itself in its own eternal truth—is what first had to become conscious [of itself] in its freedom and purity." The idea of absolute spirit could only develop on the basis of objective Christianity, and this same objective Christianity serves as a check on religio-philosophical speculation.

Baur's *Christian Gnosis* was written in 1835. Over a hundred years later, in 1945, a trove of fifty-two hitherto unknown Gnostic writings was discovered buried in a jar near Nag Hammadi in Egypt. Different literary genres were represented: gospels (like the "sayings source" used by Matthew and Luke), apocalypses, prayers, and non-Christian writings. These were Coptic translations of more ancient manuscripts, which date to the second century but may contain traditions older than the New Testament gospels. Scholars who have written about the find, such as Elaine Pagels, draw upon the Gospel of Truth, the Gospel of Philip, the Apocryphon of John, and the Apocalypse of Peter, among others, plus some of the ancient sources, especially Valentinus. Prior to Nag Hammadi, in 1896, the so-called Berlin Codex was also discovered in Egypt, containing the Gospel of Mary, the Secret Writing of John, the Wisdom of Jesus Christ, and The Acts of Peter.[20] Obviously none of these mostly gospel-type writings were known to Baur, whose information was based strictly on ancient Christian sources critical of Gnosis as a heresy. If nothing else, the new discoveries confirm that Gnosticism, in its great diversity of forms, was a massive presence in early Christianity.

Pagels makes a point of the fact that these writings were regarded as heretical, and that early church theologians together with the ecclesiastical hierarchy did everything in their power to suppress them. Her history of modern research on Gnosticism starts with Adolf Harnack, who shared the consensus view that the Gnostics propagated

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19. See Baur's analysis of various types of docetism in the section under Marcion called "The Significance of Gnostic Docetism as Such."

20. See Elaine Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels* (New York, 1979), xvi–xvii; and Christoph Markschies, *Gnosis: An Introduction*, trans. John Bowden (London, 2003), 43–58.

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false, hybrid forms of Christian teaching, which he called the "acute Hellenizing of Christianity."[21] She does not mention Baur, for whom the category of "heresy" had an entirely different meaning. Heresy simply designated for him teachings and viewpoints that did not prevail in early controversies over the meaning of Christian faith.[22] These controversies were essential to the formation of Christian doctrines, and the victors in these struggles designated everything that did not conform to their point of view as heterodox or heretical. They tried to suppress the rich diversity of conflicting viewpoints and practices in early Christianity, a diversity that Baur attempted to recapture in his historical studies. So in this respect recent Gnostic studies share a common interest with Baur's monograph. In other respects, however, his discovery in Gnosticism of a Christian religious philosophy that came to modern fruition in the philosophies of Schelling, Schleiermacher, and Hegel would likely leave contemporary Gnostic scholars astonished and unengaged. They regard Gnosticism in religio-historical rather than religio-philosophical categories, and its modern significance lies in the diversity of religious practices it discloses, as well as its interaction with Judaism and other religions.[23]

Another point made especially by Pagels is that the Gnostics used an abundance of female symbolism to describe the nature of God, the creation of the world, the hierarchies in the world, and the redemptive figure.[24] This reflects the fact (in part) that in its earliest years the Christian movement was remarkably open to women; but by the second century patriarchal authority had become entrenched and suppressed gender as well as other forms of diversity in the Christian movement, driving it underground. Baur recognized and described in detail the female imagery in Valentinian and other Gnostic systems; but he attributed it to the influence of paganism, which gave a much larger role to female forces and figures than did Judaism (despite the fact that certain key words in Hebrew such as "wisdom" and "spirit" are feminine in gender). In all the pagan systems there was a strict hierarchy between male and female, with the female occupying the lower level. Yet "the primal being is male-female, inasmuch as

21. Pagels, xx–xxx.

22. Baur notes in his Introduction that researchers of Gnosticism preceding him had to deal with the inherited prejudice that it was just "the random play of an intoxicated fantasy." They did this in part by tracing its origins to Platonism and "Oriental philosophy."

23. In addition to Pagels and Markschies (n. 20), a few other modern studies confirm this point: Robert M. Grant, *Gnosticism and Early Christianity* (New York, 1959); Michael A. Williams, *Rethinking "Gnosticism": An Argument for Dismantling a Dubious Category* (Princeton, 1996); Karen L. King, *What Is Gnosticism?* (Cambridge MA, 2003); Birger A. Pearson, *Ancient Gnosticism: Traditions and Literature* (Minneapolis, 2007). An exception is Hans Jonas who, in his classic study, *The Gnostic Religion* (Boston, 1958), turned from historical to philosophical questions and argued that Gnosticism arose from a sense of existential alienation. The Gnostic worldview was a philosophy of pessimism combined with an attempt at self-transcendence, and finds modern parallels in Heidegger. This is of course a very different philosophical perspective from that of Baur.

24. Pagels, chap. 3. This is part of her argument for the contemporary religious significance of Gnostic themes.

the thought still enclosed within the most profound silence of his essence . . . is distinguished from himself." The female is the principle of distinction and separation, thus giving birth and vitality to what would otherwise be a solitary lifeless male monad. Sophia (or Achamoth) is both a mother to and a consort of Christ, a role assumed by Mary in canonical theology.[25]

In her final chapter Pagels addresses a theme that aligns her to some degree with Hegel and Baur. The way to the knowledge of God is not through external revelations and authorities but through knowledge of oneself. By turning to the "light within," one discovers the light that enlightens the world. The Gnostics taught that the relation between God and humanity is reciprocal, each creating the other. Humans discover from their own inner potential the revelation of truth. "Many Gnostics then," she writes, "would have agreed in principle with Ludwig Feuerbach . . . that 'theology is really anthropology.' . . . For Gnostics, exploring the *psyche* became explicitly what it is for many people today implicitly—a religious quest." The religious quest is for *knowledge* because it is *ignorance*, not sin, that creates suffering (a motif central to Buddhism). "Both Gnosticism and psychotherapy value, above all, knowledge—the self-knowledge that is insight."[26] The question then becomes what prevents theology from simply *being* anthropology? Why call this a religious quest rather than a psychotherapeutic quest? Hegel and Baur were very clear that theology is not simply anthropology, that it is *God* as absolute spirit who overreaches the difference between the infinite and the finite, incorporating the finite into Godself as a differentiating moment, and returning to Godself as the true or genuine infinite. Hegel worked this conviction out with a philosophical rigor that could be beneficial for those who want to retrieve Gnostic themes today. Baur showed how the ideality of divine-human unity must be actualized in concrete historical events and figures, and how that ideality has progressed through history from Catholic orthodoxy to a modern Protestantism that stresses both the turn to the subject (Schleiermacher) and the objectivity of God (Hegel).

Cyril O'Regan, a Catholic theologian, has written the best (and virtually the only) study in English of Baur's *Die christliche Gnosis*.[27] His thesis, using tools of literary and

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25. In commenting on the mythic and symbolic form of the Gnostic systems, Baur writes: "As soon as the myth has created its own personae via the personification process typical of it, myth also cannot fail to involve sexual relationships and sexual activities. We need not elaborate on how deeply this sensuality makes inroads into the essential nature of the Gnostic systems, and the significance that marriage and procreation, and the kinship relations resting upon them, have even in the highest regions of the spiritual realm."

26. Pagels, chap. 6, esp. pp. 122–24.

27. Cyril O'Regan, *Gnostic Return in Modernity* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2001). Earlier O'Regan demonstrated his masterful hermeneutical skills in *The Heterodox Hegel* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1994). Corneliu C. Simuţ, a Romanian scholar, published in English his book, *F. C. Baur's Synthesis of Böhme and Hegel: Redefining Christian Theology as a Gnostic Philosophy of Religion* (Leiden, 2015). It is mostly a descriptive analysis of the influence of Boehme and Hegel on Baur. Appearing a couple of years earlier was his *God and Man in History: the Influence of Jacob Boehme and G. W. F. Hegel on Ferdinand*

philosophical analysis, is that the "Gnostic return" in modern Protestant discourses represents a third option in addition to orthodox and liberal Protestantism. O'Regan believes that "Gnostic ascription" is superior to other forms of heterodox Christianity: apocalyptic, Neoplatonic, and Kabbalistic. But the line from Boehme to Hegel calls into question the Christian biblical narrative, substituting for it another, ontotheological narrative, rooted in ancient Gnosis, which argues that God as trinitarian is "not given but becomes, . . . through the economy of creation, incarnation, redemption, and sanctification, in which the pathos of the cross has an essential place."[28] An extension of this model is found in post-Hegelian thinkers such as Berdyaev, Soloviev, Altizer, Tillich, and Moltmann.

O'Regan criticizes this model from the same perspective as the Catholic Tübingen School in the nineteenth century, recalling the debate between Möhler and Baur. He regards the Gnostic return as both "haunting" and "deranging," and he calls it a "fabulous catastrophe." It is fabulous because "the narrations are magnificent in their speculative adventurousness and their aesthetic appeal," and because they offer an "alternative to both the dead letter of Christianity in the post-Reformation period and the death of Christianity in the post-Enlightenment period." But it is a catastrophe because the biblical narrative "is systematically disfigured."[29] The "grammar" of biblical narrative is briefly described by O'Regan as constituted by classical versions of the central Christian doctrines: Trinity (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as determinate personal entities), creation (the world as radically distinct from God), fall (through disobedience to the rule of God), redemption (through Christ as the incarnate Son of God), resurrection, and consummation.[30] This is the consensus view from Irenaeus to the Reformers and Protestant scholastics.

In response, we may point out that, for one thing, the biblical narrative is not as sui generis as this distinction makes it sound. It too is embedded in its historical nexus and draws upon non-biblical sources. But more importantly, modernity has uncovered tensions in the story that cannot simply be papered over—historical, logical, metaphysical, psychological, scientific tensions. History is violated by repeated supernatural incursions into it and by mistaking myths and legends as historical fact. In its literal form the story is riddled with logical contradictions, and it is based on a static metaphysics for which God is regarded as an unchanging entity beyond the world (the "supreme being") rather than as a spiritual process interacting with, suffering in, and being enriched by the world. The story can be illuminated by what has been learned about human beings from the psychological and social sciences, but if construed literally it conflicts with a scientific understanding of nature.[31] Baur belonged to a

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Christian Baur's Philosophical Understanding of Religion as Gnosis (Piscataway NJ, 2013).

28. O'Regan, 33.

29. Ibid., 236.

30. Ibid., 162.

31. The classic statement of these contradictions is found in David Friedrich Strauss's *Die christliche*

generation of early nineteenth century theologians and philosophers who attempted to render the Christian metanarrative intelligible once again by rethinking central Christian doctrines, drawing upon repressed resources from the tradition, and employing bold speculative ideas. Whether they failed or succeeded, and to what degree, has been debated ever since.

SAMPLE

Glaubenslehre in ihrer geschichtlichen Entwicklung und in Kampfe mit der modernen Wissenschaft dargestellt (Tübingen and Stuttgart, 1840–41). It has never been translated. In English the title reads: *Christian Dogmatics* (or *Doctrine of Faith*) *in Its Historical Development and in Conflict with Modern Science.* From Baur's perspective, Strauss's work was purely negative and destructive, but a necessary step. See his discussion of it in *Church and Theology in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. Peter C. Hodgson, trans. Robert F. Brown and Peter C. Hodgson (Eugene OR, 2018), 371–74, incl. n. 122.