

Baur's Preface

THE FIRST PART AND the main contents of this book involve a new examination of the ancient Gnostic systems. Given the well-known, recent studies that have so successfully advanced the investigation of this topic, it might seem to many people that mine is a rather superfluous undertaking. With all due respect and gratitude for the work of my predecessors, I cannot share this view. At this very time, after the previous inquiries have made so much progress, I believed that an even further step needed to be taken. In that pursuit, may this present book—one resulting from many years' study and which I present for public evaluation—prove its worth in the eyes of qualified experts.

As in my previous historical investigations, here too in the present one my main effort has not been merely to grasp the object being investigated as an external phenomenon. Instead I have sought above all to grasp it in its internal coherence, in the particular inner movement of its concept and the totality of its elements. It seems to me that the primary and most indispensable task for every new worker on this topic is to determine the concept of Gnosis³² more precisely and more comprehensively, and from this concept itself to develop the various major forms of Gnosis as regards their origins. For these are the respects in which the results of the previous investigations can prove least satisfactory.

The initial plan for this book was first of all limited to the aforementioned goal, to those points now discussed in Part One. Nevertheless I soon became convinced that the more precise way I sought to determine the concept of Gnosis had to have a significant influence on the presentation of the individual Gnostic systems, in their development, so I believed I must part ways with previous portrayals by others on a number of points, and that only by doing so could my task be accomplished clearly and completely. Furthermore, since within the actual scope of these previous investigations there had been no inference to a main form of Gnosis—and without it there

32. [Ed.] *Gnosis* is used in Greek (γνῶσις), German, and English and means “knowledge,” especially religious knowledge or (esoteric) knowledge of spiritual truth. “Knowledge” comes from the same Indo-European root as “Gnosis,” namely *gnō*. We capitalize it 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*). Some modern scholars (e.g., Christoph Marksches) prefer the term γνῶσις to γνωστικός for both the concept and the movement.

can be no understanding of the concept of Gnosis itself in the totality of its elements—my original plan underwent an expansion to include what is now elaborated in Part Two of this book.

Thus the present volume contains a presentation of the Gnostic systems that also goes into individual instances. Except the reader should not expect it to be the kind of presentation, even of those individual systems, that views them as only less significant modifications of one of the various major forms. The completeness I aimed at could not have been an edition that traces out the large family of Gnostic systems in all of its branches. Instead it was to present only those main forms of Gnosis that must be regarded as essential elements of the concept of Gnosis, and to do so from this perspective. I have intentionally passed over other matters not directly connected with the main purpose of this book, such as a more exacting and detailed discussion of the often asked question as to whether the beginnings of Gnosis are already perceptible in the New Testament. I have become convinced that this question is to be answered very differently than in the usual way. Based on these investigations, what I have to add to these discussions, and as a contribution to answering that particular question as such, I will seek to elaborate on in my forthcoming, critical treatise on the Pastoral Epistles of the Apostle Paul.³³

Nevertheless, as I did in my depiction of the Manichean religious system,³⁴ I thought I must take particular account also of the polemic against the Gnostics, from both those in the church and those outside it. If we are to recognize the full meaning and importance of Gnosis, then it does not suffice to take it as merely an individual, free-standing phenomenon. The presentation of the Gnostic systems belongs to a *history* of Gnosis only if it follows up, as much as possible and in its full scope, on what Gnosticism has set in motion. Hence if Gnosis, indeed within its own sphere, is not understood to be a historical phenomenon in the true sense—even though the individual systems emerge as the elements necessarily conditioning themselves reciprocally, elements in which the concept of Gnosis unfolds itself in its inner, living movement—this movement must also be made the object of a historical examination in the wider sphere to which it extends, in the polemic that was directed against Gnosis and that was simply a continuation of the movement originally arising from Gnosis itself. This polemic, in itself no less valuable, deserves to be more fully appreciated. It is even the necessary point of contact (*Vermittlung*) if all those issues Gnosis was so long and so seriously occupied with resolving (as no one can deny), are said to be of innermost concern throughout the following ages and even extending to the present day.

33. [Ed.] *Die sogenannten Pastoralbriefe des Apostels Paulus aufs neue kritisch untersucht* (Stuttgart and Tübingen, 1835). Baur argues that the heretics mentioned in the Pastorals were Gnostics, probably Marcionites, and that therefore these epistles must date from a post-Pauline era.

34. [Ed.] *Das manichäische Religionssystem nach den Quellen neu untersucht und entwickelt* (Tübingen, 1831).

In the section about Plotinus pertinent to this matter, I very much wanted to be able to utilize the source cited on p. 253 n.1. But I faced difficulties presented because the works of this writer are still so inadequately edited or critically reconstructed. Of course the renowned master of Germanic philology has long since completed his work on them. But the new Oxford edition from abroad is continually delayed and thus unavailable.³⁵

Given my standpoint regarding the determination of the concept of Gnosis, my horizon of course had to reach beyond the domain of ancient Gnosis, which heretofore marked the boundaries of this kind of investigation. I employed the concept of Gnosis that is none other than the concept of religious philosophy or philosophical religion (*Religionsphilosophie*). Doing so makes the more recent religious philosophy the natural fulcrum for this whole series of investigations and the place to find the most meaningful appearance of Gnosis. I willingly acknowledge that the more recent religious philosophy has in turn been an essential tool for correctly understanding the internal organization of the Gnostic systems and for having a more profound appreciation of them. In this way the history of Gnosis, which was supposed to be the first and principal topic of these investigations, quite naturally goes on to become a history of religious philosophy. My wish is for the present volume to be seen first and foremost from this perspective. The title itself indicates as much.

In my view a history of religious philosophy, which until now has been lacking, is not possible unless we look back to the phenomena that ancient Gnosis has engendered on its own very fruitful soil. For if we once take hold of this standpoint in its full scope, and with the concept of Gnosis also gain the concept of religious philosophy, then this standpoint directly enables us to see a related series of similar phenomena in which the very same concept moves forward via the internal connection of its developing elements or moments. Just as each single component within such a nexus is conditioned by all the others, so too an encompassing historical examination, of the kind at least attempted here, can be a history of religious philosophy in which the ancient part appears mediated by the modern part, and the modern by the ancient. I believe this allows each part to illuminate the other part. It also serves to support a more accurate grasp and appreciation of the most recent religious philosophy and its relation to theology.

It is of course appropriate to include a discussion of Schleiermacher's *Glaubenslehre*³⁶ in a book on this topic. At the same time it is my way of taking up again an earlier

35. [Ed.] Presumably Baur is referring to Georg Anton Heigl, whose edition of Plotinus (*Plotini ad gnosticus* . . . [London, 1832]) he cites on the indicated page. Baur had to rely on a review of this work by F. Creuzer in the *Theologische Studien und Kritiken* (1834) since it was not yet available to him in Tübingen.

36. [Ed.] Literally, "doctrine of faith" or "dogmatics." A shorthand expression for Schleiermacher's *Der christliche Glaube* (1821, 1830). Note the formal similarity in titles between Schleiermacher's *Christian Faith* and Baur's *Christian Gnosis* (or *Christian Knowledge*).

critical endeavor I had long felt I must return to, although my view is unchanged.³⁷ It is occasioned by the well-known *Sendschreiben* of this revered man, who is now removed from the sphere of his earthly influence.³⁸ A new critical analysis of the essential elements of the *Glaubenslehre* now comes forward together with another critique of it: Heinrich Schmid, *Über Schleiermacher's Glaubenslehre mit Beziehung auf die Reden über die Religion* (Leipzig, 1835). It has not been possible for me to include a comparison and consideration of it here. Likewise I could not yet utilize August Ferdinand Dähne's *Geschichtliche Darstellung der jüdisch-alexandrinischen Religionsphilosophie* (Halle, 1834), in its two initial parts, which would have been the first place to make comparisons. For it, and others too, I took the occasion to make a few additions (some in the index, some in the list at the end of the book).

Works such as those I have mentioned, as well as numerous others, attest to the lively interest in such investigations. Also, religious philosophy has become very important, in particular because of the work of Hegel.³⁹ While I am well aware of the difficulties facing someone who takes on this task, if doing so even partially satisfies the expectations of science, perhaps the present volume will be favorably received.

37. [Ed.] See Baur's *Primae Rationalismi et Supranaturalismi historiae capita potiora*. Pars II. *Comparatur Gnosticismus cum Schleiermacherianae theologiae indole* (Tübingen, 1827). Baur argued in this work that Schleiermacher's *Glaubenslehre* is a form of *Religionsphilosophie*.

38. [Ed.] Schleiermacher had died in the previous year, 1834. He responded to the criticisms of Baur and others in his "Sendschreiben über seine Glaubenslehre, an Dr. Lücke," *Theologische Studien und Kritiken* 2 (1829), 255–84, 481–532.

39. [Ed.] G. W. F. Hegel's *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Religion* was published posthumously by Philipp Marheineke in Berlin, 1832. Baur came under its influence shortly thereafter.