Preface to the First Edition

For a long time various groups have desired to have a survey of the results brought to light by the most recent critical investigations in the field of early church history. The material itself can also call for such a presentation, since a domain of historical research that constantly requires more intensive reworking has many features that seem unimportant or superficial when looked at in isolation, but are only seen in their true light when placed in their broader context and comprised within the unity of the whole.

Providing such a survey is the main purpose of the present work. But it is not its sole purpose, for this book is not, as one might have anticipated, just a reiteration of what was already known. While I recapitulate my previous investigations by drawing together their main elements, I not only reexamine them in the light of several new perspectives, but also enhance them with additional material providing both new investigations of the sources and new source documents. The new sources include, in particular, the *Philosophumena*,[1] allegedly written by Origen. It is very important for the history of Gnosis and of early dogmas, and I have now made very extensive use of it for the first time. In addition to it I have utilized the quite remarkable *Pistis Sophia*,[2] a Gnostic text heretofore largely ignored. The main thing, however, is that I have not just made needed rearrangements of, and additions to the whole. Parts Five and Six of the present text go beyond the range of my previous authorship on the apostolic and post-apostolic times, since I have now included aspects of the church's initial emergence that must also be considered if the overall picture of the Christian Church in the first three centuries is to be as complete and comprehensive, as clear and concrete, as it possibly can be.

My consistent standpoint over these many years is well-known, and need not be explained again in detail here. I hold firmly and candidly to the convictions set forth last year in *Die Epochen der kirchlichen Geschichtsschreibung* (Tübingen, 1852),[3] which

1. [*Ed.*] See Part 3, n. 11. The Oxford edition (1851) ascribed it to Origen. The Göttingen edition (1859) attributed it to Hippolytus, as did the English translation published in vol. 5 of the *Ante-Nicene Fathers* (1886).

2. [*Ed.*] See Part 3, n. 40.

3. [*Ed.*] *The Epochs of Church Historiography*, in *Ferdinand Christian Baur: On the Writing of*

states my overall view as to how to treat church history and the general principles that guide it. That work may be regarded as an introduction to this one, which can therefore omit all these general considerations. Briefly put, from my standpoint I deal solely with what is purely historical, what is historically given, insofar as it is possible to understand it in its pure objectivity.[4] However successful I have been at this, I am in any event not consciously trying to do anything else. This awareness sufficiently shields me from any suspicions, from all those wrongheaded and malicious pronouncements that are the predominant tenor of an age caught up in its limited, partisan concerns. If we disregard all that which still inherently bears the obvious marks of one-sidedness, and which has the effrontery to treat history superficially, then certainly no one can fail to recognize what demands the most important period in the history of the Christian Church always still places on those who research and present it in historical terms. There is no mistaking the task at hand if one is just to approach more satisfactory explanations than those provided so far.

If we take the best and most current portrayals of the early history of Christianity, and look more closely at how they bring the historical materials, with their heterogeneous and far-flung components, into a unified whole, what do we see? We see how insular and fragmentary, how limp and lifeless, how vague and unclear they appear to us in so many respects. This lack of unity quite naturally becomes more apparent the farther we go back toward the points on which one first of all had to make up one's mind, and arrive at a definite view, if any historical vision of Christianity taking shape as the church is said to be possible. Any attempted investigation, in more detail and depth, of the foundation that must first of all be laid—and which no one can lay otherwise than history itself in its unchangeable truth has laid it—can only be justified by carrying it out. Such an investigation will bring coherence, steadiness, and unity to the whole; will separate out, with their differences, the various concurrent factors, and the forces and principles at work, that produced the outcomes of the first three centuries; and will track, in their reciprocal relations, all the individual features belonging to the character of a time embracing such momentous developments, thus unifying them as much as possible in an internally harmonious picture. Accordingly, insofar as it is not too deficient in all the requisites for the possibility of completing its task, such an investigation will, as I said, only be justified by carrying it out. It is from this perspective that I wish to see the present work judged, by those who are sufficiently impartial and knowledgeable to be able to appreciate such an enterprise.

Church History, ed. and trans. Peter C. Hodgson (New York, 1968). See the Editor's Foreword.

4. [*Ed.*] In the *Epochs* Baur writes: "The historian can be equal to his task only in so far as he transposes himself into the objective reality of the subject matter itself, free from the bias of subjective views and interests, . . . so that instead of making history a reflection of his own subjectivity, he may be simply a mirror for the perception of historical phenomena in their true and real form" (241). These phenomena can only be determined by historical science, but they also constitute the dialectical movement of spirit in history, which enables the historian to grasp the overall coherence of events.

Whether I shall in the future go farther along the path I have here begun—even if not to provide a detailed history, yet to indicate the points that my studies and investigation lead me to think most important, in order to follow the general course of development of the Christian Church—remains to be seen. In any event, the present work forms a presentation that stands on its own.

Tübingen, September 1853

Preface to the Second Edition

I am pleased to bring my book, *Christianity and the Christian Church of the First Three Centuries*, back to the public once again after the first edition has run its course. The first edition set forth the results of many years of study that I value and cherish because of my long engagement with, and personal interest in, the subject matter. This new edition gives me a suitable opportunity to reexamine and improve it, and to fill out the presentation there with all that seems noteworthy, in part from my own further research and in part from other literature. As should be expected, my own view of this history overall remains the same. Even where I found it advantageous to rework larger parts, as was the case most of all for Part Two, I did so only to expand upon one point or another, to emphasize the main features more sharply and define them more precisely. Overall, I endeavored to make the presentation more lucid, more precise, and to lay it out more clearly.

Since the appearance of the first edition, it has become increasingly customary to designate the standpoint I champion, in interpreting early Christianity, as that of the "Tübingen School." Some who call it by this name regard this standpoint not as wholly unjustified, yet as something one could just resist rather than assenting to it. That has in large measure also been my previous experience. Nothing deemed a product of the Tübingen School has ever lacked opponents and challengers. Although it seems that people often gladly avoid engaging in a more exacting scientific discussion of the disputed issues, they have very few reservations about behaving in a distrustful and suspicious, disparaging and reprehensible fashion. With people frequently delivering verdicts of this sort, they have envisaged the difference between the two standpoints as extraordinarily great and profound. Yet as soon as it comes to understanding this as a difference in principle, they at least want to see it basically in a different light. I can only describe my own standpoint as purely historical. Accordingly, the task is to understand Christianity as, already in its origins, a historically given phenomenon and, as such, to comprehend it in historical terms. People have no general objection to this, and are often happy and willing to agree in principle. So it surprises me when one of my most recent critics, indeed in his review of my book on the Tübingen School,[1] declares in opposition to me:

1. *Die Tübinger Schule und ihre Stellung zur Gegenwart* (Tübingen, 1859 [2nd rev. ed., 1860]).

> The issue is whether or not we have the right to view early Christianity from the same standpoint of historical development as that otherwise generally applicable to secular history. At least Protestant research agrees that this standpoint holds good for all other areas of church history. . . . We do not want to believe that someone is seriously inclined to push the antithesis to this extreme. In any event it is so very obvious that, if research should no longer retain the right to comprehend the supernatural too as in turn at the same time something natural, therefore entering [as supernatural] into, and developing within, the historical setting, then the most advisable course would be to dispense with all further scientific investigation of it. This would of course be a very fundamental reversal for science, and many gentlemen would certainly find nothing more desirable than seeing the mouths of the malevolent critics shut forever.

If people are not arguing with me about the principle, then the only question concerns how consistently they adhere to the principle and put it into practice. In fact there is no other issue. Everything just depends solely on whether people also remain faithful to the principle they recognize, when it is a matter of applying it in practice to a specific area of historical research. Yet this very thing is so often their stumbling-block. For what is a scientific view worth if it is not also supported by a scientific frame of mind in the one who holds it? Suppose that one directly seeks to circumvent the principle one has only just established, and to substitute for it something entirely different that is its direct opposite. Or that one is alarmed by the difficulty following from its application, a difficulty one can take as a candid acknowledgment of how things stand. Or if one concocts hypotheses in order to avoid the difficulty, ones too untenable to be seriously intended. Or if one emphasizes minor details in order to camouflage agreement with the principle, under the pretext of differing with it. Or, finally, even not shying away from obvious contradictions. How can such strategies involve anything other than holding two very widely divergent views, despite all the pretense of their unity in principle? In the end, whatever involves such a contradiction with its own principle can only collapse internally.

Genuine historical actuality exists only where there is life and movement, coherent and progressive development, and a more profound disclosure of the antitheses that first have to be undergone through struggle and conflict if they are to be overcome and reconciled. Thus one cannot contest the way I present things here. It relies on a view of history that, by consistently applying its principle, is sufficiently fertile and vigorous that it does not shy away from comparisons with opposing views.

It contains a detailed discussion of the aforementioned issues. [*Ed.*] Reprint of the 2nd ed. in *Ausgewählte Werke in Einzelausgaben*, ed. Klaus Scholder, vol. 5 (Stuttgart–Bad Cannstatt, 1975). The term "Tübingen School" was first coined by Baur's opponents. He wrote this book in response to an 1858 essay by Gerhard Uhlhorn (also reprinted in *Ausgewählte Werke*, vol. 5), who claimed that the School was in the process of breaking up. Baur does not identify the author of the review.

Without hesitation, I leave it to the future to judge which of the two approaches will be acknowledged as having had the truth overwhelmingly on its side.

Recently, in the final volume of his *Geschichte des Volkes Israel*, Ewald dealt with a part of the same period I discuss in this work.[2] So I am tempted to compare his understanding of history with my own. I will remark here on just this one point. We can already see, from the organization of his work, what an unclear conception this historian of the people of Israel has of Christianity's relation to the people of Israel. According to their titles, the first four volumes were said to just go up to Christ, whereas the fifth volume also adopted *Die Geschichte Christus' und seine Zeit* into the overall plan. A new body of material was added in volume 6, with the account of the apostolic age up to the destruction of Jerusalem, and the sequence concluded with volume 7 [1859], *Geschichte der Ausgänge des Volkes Israel*. This account of the ending of an era also appeared again with a twofold title. The full title, as it was put in place only after the final printing of the work, does not just include "the endings of the people of Israel," but instead is *Geschichte der Ausgänge des Volkes Israel und des nachapostolischen Zeitalters*. Ewald states in the preface (p. ix) that he "decided to call attention to the twofold content of this volume, at least on the book cover, simply for the sake of many who want to close their eyes to it, for it is self-evident that this is the end of an era in a twofold way, an ending in perdition and another one leading to a new, eternal salvation."

What is the need for a twofold title when the matter is self-evident? It seems that Ewald has been unable to wholly conceal the internal deficiency of his not-very-organically generated work in the indicated way. What is the point of referring twice here to the ending? Must we not think that, with a work said to have its natural conclusion, an author who must instruct the reader so emphatically about the endings does not rightly know himself how matters in fact stand with them; that in order to extricate himself from the different paths on which he wanders, he must first search for the ending himself. It is as though, based on different endings, we were to hear the call, "Can I just find the ending!" That is in fact the case. Whoever, like Ewald, has hardly made it clear how Christianity relates to the history of the people of Israel, where Christianity is anchored in this history, and how Christianity separates and detaches itself from it—whoever, with the vague, indeterminate concept of the truly consummate religion, as this vague concept is said to have been in the possession of

2. [*Ed.*] In what follows, Baur responds to Heinrich Ewald (1803–1875), Orientalist and biblical scholar, who taught for ten years in Tübingen (1837–47) before returning to his native Göttingen, where he had studied with J. G. Eichhorn. He engaged in a bitter personal controversy with Baur over the origins of Christianity, leading to an attack in the last volume of his *Geschichte des Volkes Israel*, 7 vols. (Göttingen, 1843–59). Ewald was also the editor/author of the *Jahrbücher der biblischen Wissenschaft*, in which he attacked Baur for many years. Ewald believed that divine providence assigned a special task to each of the nations of antiquity. The history of Israel was the history of how humanity acquired the one true religion, beginning with the exodus and culminating with Christ and Christianity. Ewald had a reputation for aggressive and often personal polemics.

the people of Israel from the outset, believes he has captured the guiding thread right up into the first Christian century; and who just knows how to repeat the stock phrase about the truly consummate religion and its eternally same essence, where it is not merely a matter of recounting events and calls for thoughtful consideration at critical points—does not of course know where the one ceases and the other one begins. How externally do the two endings stand vis-à-vis each other here? At what point, and on what basis, have these religions then separated into these two side-by-side paths? In the same manner as the ending of the people of Israel is also said to be the ending of the post-apostolic age, could one not also have made the entire histories of the world and of the church into an appendix to Ewald's history of the people of Israel?

Ewald's entire presentation of Christianity in this period accords with this vague concept of the ending. Here Christianity still appears in some fashion interlaced and entwined with Judaism, as though it would have been incapable of any independent action of its own, and that it could only have enjoyed the fresh air of a free existence, not merely after the destruction of Jerusalem but also when the last Jewish uprising under Bar Cochba had been entirely suppressed. Hence Ewald, in the best fashion of a pragmatic historiography according to a well-known but now superannuated Göttingen specimen,[3] holds forth most especially about the immeasurable consequences for Christianity that the destruction of Jerusalem supposedly had for "the everywhere tenuous groundwork of the apostolic church"—and doing so in a flurry of words whose pathos, with its persistent, and ever more forcefully intensified excitement, is of course not in itself the mindset of a calm and objective historian.

Ewald has, in the customary way, combined with the preface to this seventh volume, a survey of the entire literary and political world, an overview he had to be especially inclined to provide then, right at the pinnacle where he stood in concluding a work that, in the "more than thirty years in which he directed his mental labors to the topic, and the nearly twenty years he set his hand to the task of writing about it," embraces such an extensive and eventful period of time—and fully conscious of "the recognition the now concluded work has gained." Naturally, I am fittingly included among the harmful influences of our time that oppose his views, and he cannot sufficiently bewail their fundamentally destructive impact as compared with his own influence, which alone is salutary. This time he gives me such extensive attention, since I did indeed just recently venture to say something judgmental about him.[4] Yet

3. [*Ed.*] Baur's reference here is perhaps to Gottlieb Jakob Planck (1751–1833), one of Ewald's predecessors at Göttingen, a "rational supernaturalist" whose method is described in Baur's *Epochs of Church Historiography* (p. xxiii n. 3) as "subjective pragmatism at its peak" (184 ff., esp. 185 n. 29).

4. *Die Tübinger Schule* (n. 1), 119–68. Among other things, he states his views about this in his preface ([to vol. 7], p. xviii), that what I have to say in detail against others, and express in a "feebler" and briefer way against him, is so completely vacuous, but also so completely foolish and undoubtedly off the mark, that in saying this I have just provided a reminder of my own unscientific methods. In a subsequent article in the *Jahrbücher der biblischen Wissenschaft* Ewald adds that one need not waste one's time evaluating such "Tübingen scribbling." The way he seeks to find solace here, in the impression this little text has made on him, is too ingenuous, as is his wish to rise above this treachery. He

everything he has to say in reply just confirms what I said. Now he can only scold and belittle, and just give new proof of his utter inability to even stand apart from himself and his own subjectivity, as rational reflection calls for in opposing its enemies. It is truly ridiculous how, in painting the darkest picture of my entire life and influence, in attributing to me superficiality, fundamental perversity, rashness, laziness, and appalling consequences of my own making, he reproaches me for extremely pernicious errors and false aspirations. He supposes he can, at a single stroke, cancel out my entire life's activity.

Does he then believe it all comes down to railing haphazardly, in the crudest and most vulgar way, against the opponent so that the whole world would believe it too? I am a public figure just like he is. Anyone who knows me can judge my writings, my scholarly activity; and I do not even in the least fear comparison of what someone says about me with what I am in reality and what influence I have. I can only be amazed at his failure to see how, in saying nothing about others, he leaves himself open by such a lack of critical judgment. Just how has it impressed any one of my opponents when, among so many disparaging and defamatory things he has long said about me, he also, in his *Jahrbücher der biblischen Wissenschaft*, has for years, in the most absurd way, also denied that I have any ethical consciousness? How does it vouch for the objectivity of his historical judgment when, where everything is laid out and all can judge for themselves, he hardly knows himself how to distinguish his own subjective notions, his set ideas, the products of his own malicious passions, from the true state of affairs? There can be nothing vaguer, more trivial, more pointless, than such an exhibition of Ewald's calumny, the kind he reiterates in his most recent preface. From it one can simply see how little he even knows what he is talking about. It is a forewarning of the contradictions in which he gets himself embroiled.

On p. xvi [of vol. 7] Ewald brags about never having in the least done anything contrary to freedom and science. Yet there can be nothing more high-handed than the peremptory way he treats all his opponents (and of course all who find themselves opposing him in any sort of difference of opinion, and do not unconditionally embrace his own views and perceptions, are opponents), and how he wants to dominate, in the manner of a despot, by claiming absolute authority. In his love for the freedom of science, he also calls upon the Swabians to make even greater efforts than previously to liberate their Tübingen from such a reputation (as I have given it and Tübingen has acquired because of me)! It is surely obvious what kind liberation he has in mind,

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supposes I could just publish "feebler" thoughts, although all those besides himself are feebler than he, the unparalleled one. While he supposes he would be exempted from what I say against him more briefly than I say it about others, one can nevertheless state briefly what hits the nail on the head. However, if he should once try to rebut just one sentence of this "scribbling" of mine—naturally not in everyday expressions that are of course always at hand, but in a scientific way, with reasons and proofs—that will show whether or not he is in a position to do so. [*Ed.*] In *Die Tübinger Schule*, Baur describes and criticizes Ewald's attempt (in the fifth volume of his history of Israel) to harmonize the Gospel of John's portrayal of Christ with that found in the Synoptic Gospels.

from how he has depicted my influence, mine alone, and from what he can hope for from the Swabians he has called upon to support him.

If anything Ewald says about me, and considers to be the basically destructive feature of my influence, has any sort of rational sense behind it, that could only be related to my disputing the apostolic origin of several of the canonical scriptures. But does he not do the same thing himself? Indeed, he too declares that a number of canonical epistles are pseudo-apostolic writings: Ephesians, the three Pastoral Epistles, and Second Peter. And if one cannot speak of "pseudo-apostolic" scriptures without employing the correct concept of pseudonymity, in the ancient sense, then he certainly has the same view of it (see 7:139, 231, 248, 315, and 321) as the one I have long held. So what is the point of this overly fanatical opposition to me, as though the issue involves the most absolute antithesis!

Let him express himself and blow off steam howsoever he will, about important and unimportant matters in the political and literary world as well as about me, under the cover of a freedom that no rational person can be envious of. All this is not in the slightest way a verdict calling for my attention. In his most recent preface he recalls our previous collegial relations, in order to inform me that, as he is now proud to say, back then he thought our collegial friendship was bogus. That statement gives me greater insight into the cause of the hatred he now bears, not merely against me but also against Tübingen in general. The cause lies in what he calls my philosophical presuppositions[5] ([vol. 7], p. xvi). For him, to be sure, the direct opposite is the case—the absence of what, very understandably, seems to him a very extraneous presupposition, whereas here in Tübingen it is still always counted among the requisites of a scientifically educated theologian. He was supposedly less bitterly enraged in 1848, the year he broke free from his captivity in Tübingen.

The fate of the view of history I have championed is that it has to fight its way past opponents of all kinds. So the reader may excuse me for using this space to present the foregoing account, which had to be stated in the interest of truth, and to publicly express the moral contempt that such conduct deserves from all educated people.

The struggles I have previously endured have hardly disheartened me. Instead I felt the desire and fortitude to continue the history of the early church up to the end of the sixth century, with the continuation appearing in 1859 as a companion to this book.[6] I also plan to venture on to the medieval church and to follow out the history

5. [*Ed.*] Ewald regarded Baur's philosophical presuppositions, based on Schelling and Hegel, to be atheistic because they did not allow for a supernatural causality. Rather for Baur the divine idea operates *within* the historical nexus and does not interrupt natural causality. He believed that every historian makes at least implicit philosophical assumptions.

6. [*Ed.*] *Die christliche Kirche vom Anfang des vierten bis zum Ende des sechsten Jahrhunderts* (Tübingen, 1859). Baur prepared the third volume, on the medieval church, for the press, but it was not published until after his death. He suffered a severe stroke in July 1860, followed by a second fatal stroke in late autumn. The last two volumes, from the Reformation to the middle of the nineteenth century, were based on lecture notes, edited by F. F. Baur and E. Zeller.

of its development in similar fashion, to the extent that my already aging powers still permit it.

Tübingen, February 1860