



ALFARIC, PROSPER

ALFARIC, PROSPER (1876-1955), French historian of religions. The son of a farmer, Alfaric was ordained a Roman Catholic priest in 1900 and taught in the seminaries of Bayeux, Bordeaux, and Albi. Drawn away from the faith by his philosophical and historical studies, he quietly left the church in 1910. In 1918 he defended two doctoral theses and the following year was named professor of the history of religions in the Faculty of Letters at Strasbourg. There he wrote numerous articles on the origins of Christianity; in 1925 he issued a translation of the Gospel according to Saint Mark, accompanied by *Examen critique de l'Évangile selon Marc*. Excommunicated in 1934, he published a study of the manuscripts of Ernest Renan's *Vie de Jésus* in 1939. He settled in Paris in 1945, and ten years later published a book of memoirs (*De la Foi à la Raison*) in which he retraced the experiences and reflections that had led him to quit the church. After his death his collected articles were published under the title *À l'école de la Raison* (1956); also published was unfinished work, *Origines sociales du christianisme* (1959).

As a “mythist,” one who rejects the historical existence of Jesus, Alfaric kept up a lively interest in everything to do with the origins of Christianity, including gnosticism, heresies, and Oriental religions. In the course of his life, a number of his works touched on Iran. In one article (“Zoroastre avant l’Avesta,” *Revue d'histoire et de littératures religieuses* 7, 1921, pp. 1ff.), he argued that there existed from the sixth century B.C. a Greek poem attributed to Zoroaster, in which the Zurvanist doctrine was supposed to have been revealed—an adventurous hypothesis refuted by Franz Cumont in the same journal (8, 1922,



pp. 1-22). It was in connection with Manicheism that Alfaric made his principal contributions. He assisted Paul Pelliot on the commentary, “Un traité manichéen retrouvé en Chine” (*JA*, November-December 1911, pp. 499-617). His doctoral thesis on Manicheism as Saint Augustine knew and professed it (*L'Évolution intellectuelle de Saint Augustin*, Paris, 1918) included a long and copious exposition of Manichean theological and moral doctrines, both considered in themselves and analyzed according to all the sources then available; but the study is relatively uncritical and unoriginal. Much more important is Alfaric's other thesis, *Les Écritures manichéennes, leur constitution, leur histoire* (published in two volumes: *Vue générale*, Paris, 1917; *Étude analytique*, Paris, 1918). Quite complete for its time in assembling, characterizing, and occasionally reconstructing the texts written or used by Mani and his followers, it takes into account all available documents. In the decades that have elapsed since Alfaric wrote the work it has inevitably become somewhat outdated, but it remains a valuable working tool not yet superseded.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Given in the text.