



BAUR, FERDINAND CHRISTIAN

BAUR, FERDINAND CHRISTIAN (21 June 1792-2 December 1860), German theologian and scholar of Manicheism. Born at Schmiden near Stuttgart, he was the son of a Protestant pastor. In the course of training for the ministry, he attended the theological colleges at Blaubeuren and Maulbronn (1805-09). Next he studied theology, philosophy, and ancient languages at the University of Tübingen (1809-14). Publication of his first scholarly writings in 1817 drew attention to his abilities and led to his appointment to a professorship at Blaubeuren in the same year. While there he came under the influence of Schleiermacher's philosophy of religion, but after his appointment to the University of Tübingen in 1826 he increasingly adopted Hegel's dialectical method of reasoning and historical interpretation. The first example of Baur's application of this method to early Christian history is his essay "Die Christuspartei in der korinthischen Gemeinde, der Gegensatz des petrinischen und paulinischen Christentums in der Ältesten Kirche, der Apostel Petrus in Rom" (*Tübinger Zeitschrift für Theologie* 3, 1831, pp. 61-206). This may be regarded as the position paper of the Tübingen school of New Testament researchers, in whose view the transmitted texts show evidence of historical development through the process of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis.

Baur is described as an impressive university teacher, but in his last years he was to witness the downfall of his school. In Prussia advocates of Baur's undogmatic historical approach encountered bureaucratic obstacles and found themselves compelled either to follow the officially approved line in their teaching or to choose other careers. It must be added that too rigid or



biased application of Baur's method to canonical texts had in some cases given rise to distortions and errors. With Baur's death in 1860 his school also expired.

In the same year 1831 in which the essay on early Christian history came out, Baur published his second momentous work *Das manichäische Religionssystem nach den Quellen neu untersucht und entwickelt*. In it the Hegelian critical method for which Baur later became so well known is not used. This book earned a scholarly reputation in a much wider sphere than the circle of Lutheran theologians. It is a general survey of the Manichean teaching, admirably methodical, based on all the then available sources, with sound assessment of their worth, and still valid on most important points. It has been the model for all subsequent accounts of this religion.

Most important was Baur's view of Manicheism, as a religion born at the watershed of the ancient and Christian worlds. He considered Manicheism to be the last great assemblage of ancient pre-Christian "nature spirit" beliefs which expressed religious consciousness "in figurative disguise," focusing it on man's imprisonment in the universe rather than on his inner life and seeing each individual's soul as a reflection of the "common world-soul." Manicheism therefore played the same role as neo-Platonism did in Greco-Roman society (pp. 487ff.). Baur rightly concluded that Manicheism was not a Christian heresy but a world religion *sui generis* (pp. 368ff.) and that it set forth an Oriental doctrine.

At the same time Baur was aware that Manichean syncretism flowed from many different sources. With regard to Zoroaster's teachings, Baur rightly attached great importance to the shared dualism of the Zoroastrians and the Manicheans and held that in this respect Manicheism had "its deepest roots" in Zoroastrianism, but he also recognized the great differences between them and refuted the then common opinion that Manicheism was merely a combination of Zoroastrianism and Christianity (pp. 404ff.). Against this he regarded Buddhism as an important formative influence, finding evidence in a wide range of shared features (pp. 433ff.). That theory was contested by contemporary critics and has not been borne out by subsequent research, which credits Buddhism with at most a minor role in the genesis of Manicheism.

It should be noted, however, that Baur had in mind not only a direct influence of Buddhism on Mani but also an indirect influence through the channel of



gnosticism. He saw evidence of this in the story of Simon Magus in the pseudo-Clementine homilies (pp. 467ff.). His citations really amounted to no more than speculative surmises. Nevertheless recent research has, perhaps surprisingly, lent force to Baur's conclusion that certain details of the homilies point to "a source which appears to have been the same or at least very nearly the same as the source from which Manicheism flowed" (p. 486). It is now known from the so-called Mani Codex at Cologne that Mani was bred in a Judeo-Christian Elkesaite environment. This disclosure of course necessitates revision of Baur's appraisal of the importance of Christianity in the formation of the Manichean system (pp. 368ff.). More was involved in Mani's relationship to Christianity than "a form of the old nature religion clad in the language of Christianity" (p. 404).

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