

**FERDINAND  
CHRISTIAN BAUR:  
A READER**

Edited by  
David Lincicum and  
Johannes Zachhuber



**FERDINAND CHRISTIAN BAUR**



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# A Reader

*Edited by*  
*David Lincicum and Johannes Zachhuber*

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# PREFACE

Composing a *Reader* for an author as prolific and versatile as Ferdinand Christian Baur is both rewarding and challenging.

Baur's published oeuvre runs to *c.* 25,000 pages and thus encompasses approximately 7.5 million words. He wrote on New Testament criticism, church history, the history of religions, and the philosophy of religion. In addition, he was also an active participant in academic and political developments of the time. He engaged in debates about the "essence" of Protestantism and its relationship to other manifestations of Christianity, notably Catholicism.

Few if any will have the opportunity, the ability, or indeed the desire to read it all. It is therefore arguable that Baur like few other writers offers himself to the effort of the compiler. And yet, to this date no *Reader* with excerpts from Baur's many publications exists in any language. We are, consequently, excited to offer the present book as a first attempt to introduce those with an interest in Baur's work to his writings through a collection of excerpts from his most important texts.

That said, we are conscious that any attempt to select from the wealth of texts Baur penned cannot but be partial and must, to an extent, reflect the concerns and specializations of those who have put it together. The present *Reader* probably says something about the viewpoints of its editors with their interests in the origin of modern New Testament Studies and theological historicism. Some might wish that Baur's texts on Greek religion, on Platonism and Christianity, on mysticism or the principle of Protestantism would be more strongly represented. Without denying that there is more to be discovered, however, we feel confident that Baur's main areas of scholarly activity are well represented in the *Reader*. Even most of his minor interests come to the fore here or there, and those whose interest is kindled by what they find here can, of course, always explore what else there is beyond the confines of the present book.

We both have spent many years with Baur's works, but the process of selecting from the breadth of his oeuvre and the ensuing opportunity to look concurrently at such a wide variety of texts has been highly illuminating for both of us. Underlying concerns that extend through and structure Baur's many fields of academic interest become visible, putting into relief the remarkable coherence of a scholarly oeuvre whose contours can easily get lost in the extraordinary amount of text dedicated to such a variety of specialist topics.

In publishing this volume, we hope that others will have the same experience. F. C. Baur is more often cited than read. He has often been pigeonholed in one way or another. If those who are inclined to critique or dismiss him will in the future first make an effort to read him in his own words, this *Reader* will have reached its purpose.

David Lincicum and Johannes Zachhuber  
South Bend/Oxford, August 2021



# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We could not have produced this *Reader* without support from various sides. Beata and Matthew Vale translated Baur's texts for chapters 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 13. Without their enormous effort at what can be a rather impenetrable original, this project would have been impossible to complete.

The other chapters reproduce previously published translations. Here too we need to acknowledge the generous support that made our own work possible.

Oxford University Press kindly gave permission to reprint chapter 4 from F. C. Baur, *The History of Christian Dogma*, trans. Robert F. Brown and Peter C. Hodgson (Oxford: OUP, 2014); and chapter 10 from F. C. Baur, *On the Writing of Church History*, ed. and trans. Peter C. Hodgson (Oxford: OUP, 1968).

Wipf and Stock kindly gave permission to reprint chapter 9 from F. C. Baur, *Paul, the Apostle of Jesus Christ*, trans. Robert F. Brown and Peter C. Hodgson (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2021); chapter 11 from F. C. Baur, *Christianity and the Christian Church of the First Three Centuries*, trans. Robert F. Brown and Peter C. Hodgson (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2019); and chapter 12 from F. C. Baur, *Church and Theology in the Nineteenth Century*, trans. Robert F. Brown and Peter C. Hodgson (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2018).

Fortress Press kindly permitted reprinting chapter 14 from Christophe Chalamet (ed.), *The Challenge of History: Readings in Modern History* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2020).

Prof. Peter Hodgson supplied editable files for all his translations we are here reprinting. He also gave invaluable advice on the selections from Baur's huge oeuvre. We feel privileged that in this enormously difficult task we had the guidance of the grand master of Baur studies.

We furthermore gratefully acknowledge the support of the Institute for Scholarship in the Liberal Arts, College of Arts and Letters, and of the Nanovic Institute for European Studies, both of the University of Notre Dame.

## NOTE ON TEXT AND TRANSLATIONS

The present *Reader* combines new and existent translations. Chapters 1, 2, 3, 5, 7, 8, and 13 have been translated for this volume and, with the exception of Chapter 2, have never been rendered into English before. By contrast, Chapters 4, 9, 10, 11, 12, and 14 reproduce translations that have previously been published. As for the latter, the editors have not changed the translated texts except for the correction of obvious errors. For the new translations on the other hand, which were prepared by Beata and Matthew Vale, the editors bear full responsibility.

The different provenance of the translations has inevitably led to a certain heterogeneity in the principles of rendering Baur's text. These differences, which careful readers will be able to observe across the volume, seemed a small price to pay, however, when compared with the benefit of drawing on the outstanding scholarship of those whose translations the editors were able to use.

Regarding annotations, similar divergences have been accepted by the editors. In the newly translated texts, the editors have generally omitted Baur's own notes, whereas previously published translations have mostly incorporated them. Overall, the editors have, again, accepted this inconsistency. The editors have, however, checked all annotations carefully, modified them, or added to them as appropriate. As the procedure varied throughout the book, the reader will find an indication of what notes to expect at the beginning of each chapter.

The editors have consistently added references to Baur's original pagination as well as the pagination of published English translations where they were reprinted here. The former are given in square brackets ([ ]), the latter in angled brackets (<>).

All translators of Baur's German are faced with some difficult decisions. Baur's sentences often run on for too many lines and include parentheses that are hard to follow for the most attentive reader. He was also no friend of regular paragraph breaks. Many of his texts contain few or no subheadings to give orientation in chapters that can go on for dozens of pages.

The editors have followed precedent by breaking up Baur's paragraphs into accessible units. Where appropriate, they have also inserted additional headings. For those, Baur's often extensive, analytic tables of contents have sometimes been helpful. Where this is the case, this will be indicated in the text.

A further problem consists in Baur's vocabulary which includes terms with no perfect correspondence in English. Annotations are used to explain some of the more difficult decisions taken by the translators.

For some recurrent cases, the following Glossary may also be helpful. Annotations throughout the volume will refer back to it.

**Concept (*Begriff*):** For Hegel and Baur this is an ontological as much as an epistemological term. Using the language of *Begriff* permits Baur to conceive of "intellectual history," for example, the history of dogma, as real, objective, historical evolution.

**Consideration (*Betrachtung*)** is the term Baur typically uses for critical, scientific (*wissenschaftlich*) historical method. It has both an empirical and a speculative (reflective) component (cf. CCC, 3, n. 1).

**In itself/for itself (*an sich/für sich*):** When Baur refers to something as it is “in itself,” this does not normally signify its true being (unlike Kant’s famously elusive “thing-in-itself”). Rather, being in itself is only the first step in a process which subsequently has to involve the acquisition of full self-awareness, being “for itself.” In Hegel’s language, the full truth about a thing is its being in-and-for-itself (*an und für sich*). This conceptual and ontological movement from “in itself” to “for itself” to “in-and-for-itself” is often found in Baur’s language, especially in his writings from 1835 to 1847.

**Science (*Wissenschaft*):** The German *Wissenschaft* has retained the broader meaning of Latin *scientia* which in English has been lost from the mid-nineteenth century. Science can thus be employed for humanities disciplines such as history or philosophy as much as for the natural sciences. In addition, Baur sometimes uses *Wissenschaft* in an emphatic sense for philosophy in the Hegelian sense. Hegel often employed the term as a conscious derivative of *Wissen* (knowledge) and could, in fact, use *Wissenschaft* and *Wissen* interchangeably. Later, under the influence of Strauss, Baur employs *Wissenschaft* in a more positivistic sense for the “presuppositionless,” methodologically driven examination of empirical sources.

**Spirit or mind (*Geist*):** It is crucial for all idealist systems of thought that the German *Geist* is both a philosophical and a theological term. The transition from a discussion of the mind and of mental faculties to the biblical language of the Holy Spirit is thus easy in a way that is difficult to render into English. Generally, where Baur uses the Hegelian language of *Geist* as a fundamentally ontological category, the English “spirit” (not capitalized) is used. “Spirit” (capitalized) is employed where the predominant reference is to the third Person of the Trinity.

**Sublate (*aufheben*):** In the German term, three meanings coalesce: (1) cancel out, abolish; (2) retain; (3) lift up. The (rather artificial) English term “sublate” is often employed to convey the fluctuation between these meanings which in Baur is often intentional.

**System of Doctrine (*Lehrbegriff*):** *Lehrbegriff* was a popular theological term in nineteenth-century German without an obvious English equivalent. It denotes a coherent body of teaching central for a religious tradition.

# ABBREVIATIONS

## 1. Baur's main works

- AE “Abgenöthigte Erklärung gegen einen Artikel der evangelischen Kirchenzeitung, herausgegeben von Dr. E. W. Hengstenberg, Prof. der Theol. an der Universität zu Berlin. Mai 1836.” *Tübinger Zeitschrift für Theologie* 1836, Issue 3: 179–232.
- BdR “Über den Begriff der Religionsphilosophie.” *Zeitschrift für speculative Theologie* 2 (1837): 368–73.
- CCK *Das Christenthum und die christliche Kirche der ersten drei Jahrhunderte*. Tübingen: Fues, 1853; 2nd ed. 1860.
- CCC *Christianity and the Christian Church in the First Three Centuries*, ed. Peter C. Hodgson; trans. Robert F. Brown and Peter C. Hodgson. Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2019.
- CG *Christian Gnosis*, ed. Peter C. Hodgson; trans. Robert F. Brown. Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2020.
- CKA *Die christliche Kirche vom Anfang des vierten bis zum Ende des sechsten Jahrhunderts in den Hauptmomenten ihrer Entwicklung*. Tübingen: Fues, 1859.
- CKM *Die christliche Kirche des Mittelalters in den Hauptmomenten ihrer Entwicklung*, ed. Ferdinand Friedrich Baur. Tübingen: Fues, 1861.
- CLV *Die christliche Lehre von der Versöhnung in ihrer geschichtlichen Entwicklung von der ältesten Zeit bis auf die neueste*. Tübingen: Osiander, 1838.
- CPKG “Die Christuspartei in der korinthischen Gemeinde, der Gegensatz des petrinischen und paulinischen Christenthums in der ältesten Kirche, der Apostel Petrus in Rom.” *Tübinger Zeitschrift für Theologie* (1831), no. 4: 61–206.
- CTNC *Church and Theology in the Nineteenth Century*, trans. Robert F. Brown and Peter c. Hodgson. Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2018.
- DCG *Die christliche Gnosis oder die christliche Religions-Philosophie in ihrer geschichtlichen Entwicklung*. Tübingen: Osiander, 1835.

- ECH *The Epochs of Church Historiography*, trans. Peter C. Hodgson, in: *Ferdinand Christian Baur on the Writing of Church History*, ed. Peter Hodgson. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968.
- EkG *Epochen der kirchlichen Geschichtsschreibung*. Tübingen: Fues, 1852.
- ENT “Die Einleitung in das Neue Testament als theologische Wissenschaft.” *Theologische Jahrbücher* 9 (1850): 463–566; 10 (1851): 70–94, 222–52, 291–328.
- HCD *History of Christian Dogma*, trans. Robert F. Brown and Peter C. Hodgson. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014.
- KGNJ *Kirchengeschichte des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts*, ed. Eduard Zeller. Tübingen: Fues, 1862.
- KGNZ *Kirchengeschichte der neueren Zeit, von der Reformation bis zum Ende des achtzehnten Jahrhunderts*, ed. Ferdinand Friedrich Baur. Tübingen: Fues, 1863.
- KUKE *Kritische Untersuchungen über die kanonischen Evangelien, ihr Verhältniss zu einander, ihren Charakter und Ursprung*. Tübingen: Fues, 1847.
- LD *Lehrbuch der Dogmengeschichte*. Stuttgart: Becher, 1847.
- LDM *Die christliche Lehre von der Dreieinigkeit und Menschwerdung Gottes in ihrer geschichtlichen Entwicklung*, 3 vols. Tübingen: Osiander, 1841–3.
- NTT *Lectures on New Testament Theology*, ed. Peter C. Hodgson; trans. Robert F. Brown. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016.
- PAJC *Paulus, der Apostel Jesu Christi. Sein Leben und Wirken, seine Briefe und seine Lehre: Ein Beitrag zu einer kritischen Geschichte des Urchristenthums*. Stuttgart: Becher und Müller, 1845.
- PAJC(E) *Paul the Apostle of Jesus Christ*, ed. Peter C. Hodgson; trans. Robert F. Brown and Peter C. Hodgson. Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2021.
- PAP *Die sogenannten Pastoralbriefe des Apostels Paulus aufs neue kritisch untersucht*. Stuttgart and Tübingen: Cotta, 1835.
- SuM *Symbolik und Mythologie oder die Naturreligion des Alterthums* 2 vols. Stuttgart: Metzler, 1824–5.
- VNT *Vorlesungen über neutestamentliche Theologie*, ed. Ferdinand Friedrich Baur. Leipzig: Fues’s Verlag, 1864; reprint Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1973, with an introduction by W. G. Kümmel.

## 2. Other abbreviations

ThJb(T) *Theologische Jahrbücher* (Tübingen), ed. Eduard Zeller. Tübingen: Fues, 1842–57.

TZTh *Tübinger Zeitschrift für Theologie*, ed. Members of the Evangelical-Theological Faculty. Tübingen: Osiander (later Fues), 1828–40.

ZWT *Zeitschrift für wissenschaftliche Theologie*, ed. Adolf Hilgenfeld. Jena, Halle, Leipzig, Frankfurt/M: Hauke, 1858–1914.



# Introduction

DAVID LINCICUM AND JOHANNES ZACHHUBER

Ferdinand Christian Baur was, without a doubt, one of the giants of nineteenth-century Christian theology. In his influential *History of Protestant Theology in the Nineteenth Century*, Karl Barth called him “the greatest theologian since Schleiermacher.”<sup>1</sup> Baur was not only extremely prolific—his entire published oeuvre runs to approximately 25,000 pages—he was also remarkably versatile even for a time when scholars were generally less specialized than they are now. He must be considered as one of the founders of modern New Testament studies, contributed in major ways to the history of dogma and church history in general, but wrote also on the history of religion and the philosophy of religion. In addition, Baur was also an active participant in major scientific and religious controversies of the time. He mastered the controversialist’s sharp, witty, and polemical style as much as the reflective diction of the scholar.

Despite his indubitable merits, however, Baur is considerably less well known than comparable nineteenth-century figures, such as Friedrich Schleiermacher, Albrecht Ritschl, or Ernst Troeltsch. In 2017, Peter C. Hodgson could write that “in the Anglophone world, Baur is still the most neglected and least appreciated of the major German theologians of the nineteenth century.”<sup>2</sup> There may be more than one reason for this state of affairs. Baur reached the apogee of his scholarly productivity just at the point when political life in Germany turned decisively against any form of liberalism. Some of his most gifted students were either altogether prevented from attaining university posts, such as David Friedrich Strauss, or pushed into neighboring disciplines, such as Baur’s son-in-law, Eduard Zeller, who was officially banned from teaching theology and instead became an influential scholar of ancient philosophy.<sup>3</sup>

It is, however, arguable that the reasons for the limitations of Baur’s reception were not purely extraneous. Baur wrote constantly, but many of his publications were not accessibly written, not even by the standards of the German academy in the nineteenth century. He published extensive monographs on an almost yearly basis, but most of them never saw more than a single edition. Other important ideas appeared in journal articles which often ran to more than one hundred pages in length. The reader can be forgiven for suspecting that the price Baur paid for his productivity was the absence, more or less, of an editorial process. Many of his publications read as if they were

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<sup>1</sup>Karl Barth, *History of Protestant Theology in the Nineteenth Century: Its Background and History*, new edn. (London: SCM, 2001), 485.

<sup>2</sup>Peter C. Hodgson, “Translator’s Introduction,” in *Ferdinand Christian Baur and the History of Early Christianity*, ed. Martin Bauspieß, Christof Landmesser and David Lincicum (Oxford: OUP, 2017), v. The most important existing portrayal of Baur in English remains Hodgson’s own *The Formation of Historical Theology: A Study of Ferdinand Christian Baur* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966). Cf. also Horton Harris, *The Tübingen School* (Oxford: OUP, 1975); Johannes Zachhuber, *Theology of Science in Nineteenth-Century Germany: From F. C. Baur to Ernst Troeltsch* (Oxford: OUP, 2013); and the studies collected in Martin Bauspieß, Christof Landmesser, and David Lincicum (eds), *Ferdinand Christian Baur and the History of Early Christianity* (Oxford: OUP, 2017).

<sup>3</sup>Zachhuber, *Theology of Science*, 21–2.



printed as he put them originally to paper. Even a fast and diligent reader will not always find it easy to keep track of Baur's ideas and arguments.

If his productivity may, ironically, have been a factor hampering Baur's reception, his very versatility was arguably another one. Baur is today known and discussed for his scholarly contributions to New Testament studies or his Hegelian leanings, or as the author of a polemical critique of Johann Adam Möhler's *Symbolik*. Such discussions, however, provoke the question of what his underlying theological vision was. Is there any coherence between these various and rather different aspects of his work? The absence of a single work summarizing his ideas makes this kind of question difficult to answer, but without some awareness of the unity behind Baur's work, his overall contribution to theology and the study of religions more broadly is impossible to adjudicate.

The present *Reader* is aimed at beginning to fill this lacuna. Texts have deliberately been chosen from across Baur's work, including his exegetical and historical writings as much as his more philosophical or polemical ones. The overall purpose is to facilitate access to Baur's thought through his own words. While individual readers may, of course, choose to focus on the sections of the book which are close to their own specific interests, the editors hope to encourage a perception of Baur's thought in its broader contours. It is the task of this introduction to offer some guidelines for such an approach. After some biographical information, therefore, we will comment briefly on Baur's major areas of scholarship and their interrelation.

## BAUR'S LIFE

Baur was born on June 21, 1792, in Schmidlen, a village near Stuttgart in the Duchy of Württemberg (now Baden-Württemberg, Germany), where at the time his father, Jakob Christian Baur, was the Lutheran Pastor.<sup>4</sup> He was educated at home until the age of fourteen, then sent to the lower theological seminaries of Blaubeuren and Maulbronn. In 1809, Baur entered the University of Tübingen to study philosophy and theology. His most influential teacher there was Ernst Gottlieb Bengel (1769–1826), the leading theologian in Tübingen. Bengel was known for his attempt to modernize supranaturalism by injecting it with Kantian ideas. Baur also encountered other ideas in Tübingen, however. In 1812, for example, he attended a lecture course by Carl August Eschenmayer (1768–1852) who was a follower of F. W. J. Schelling.

Baur graduated from Tübingen in 1814 as the first of his class. He initially went through a succession of smaller preaching and teaching posts until, in 1817, he was appointed to a professorship at the seminary in Blaubeuren. Despite the grand title, Baur was effectively a schoolmaster there with teaching responsibilities in classical literature and history. A lecture manuscript on ancient history (*Die Geschichte des Alterthums*) is extant from this time.<sup>5</sup> While in Blaubeuren, Baur married, in 1821, Emilie Becher (1802–39). The couple had two sons and three daughters of which one, Emilie Caroline, went on to marry Baur's student, Eduard Zeller (1814–1908).

Baur remained at Blaubeuren until 1826. In that year, Bengel died, and Baur was made his successor as Professor Ordinarius of Evangelical Theology at his *alma mater*. In connection with

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<sup>4</sup>The fullest account of Baur's biography is Gustav Fraedrich, *Ferdinand Christian Baur der Begründer der Tübinger Schule als Theologe, Schriftsteller und Charakter* (Gotha: Perthes, 1909).

<sup>5</sup>F. C. Baur, *Geschichte des Alterthums*, unpublished lecture manuscript, undated [prior to 1826], Tübinger Universitätsbibliothek, Mh II 166q.

his professorial appointment, he wrote, as was common, a brief Latin dissertation. Baur's essay was entitled *Primae rationalismi et supranaturalismi historiae* and contained an attempt to overcome the theological opposition of rationalism and supranaturalism through a historical study of Gnosticism. The small work was, in many ways, programmatic for Baur's work in subsequent years. Theologically, he identified with the goal of tracing a path beyond the staid opposition between (orthodox) supranaturalism and (enlightened) rationalism.<sup>6</sup>

Characteristically, Baur identified the key to this conundrum in the application of a philosophically informed history to theological questions. Hence, his study of Gnosticism was both an exercise in historical theology and a systematic argument supposedly relevant in his own time. The latter point is underscored by Baur's attempt, in a second part of his dissertation, to draw a parallel between one variant of Gnosticism and the theology of Friedrich Schleiermacher. For Baur, who had read the *Glaubenslehre* soon after it was first published, this was his way of showing his appreciation of what he thought was the most important theological work in a long time,<sup>7</sup> but Schleiermacher could be forgiven for taking it as censure. His two *Letters to Lücke on the Glaubenslehre* contained a sharp repudiation of Baur's interpretation.<sup>8</sup>

This was neither the first nor the last time that Baur miscalculated the personal effect his scholarly work could have. His *Symbolik und Mythologie* was intended as an emphatic endorsement of Friedrich Creuzer's position on the matter for which the latter had come under heavy fire, but Creuzer bluntly and publicly rejected Baur's overtures.<sup>9</sup> In his controversy with Johann Adam Möhler, too, Baur arguably underestimated how much his expressions of estimation would be drowned out by the sharp tone of his scholarly critique.

Baur remained professor in Tübingen until his death, on December 2, 1860. In these almost thirty-five years, his life was of legendary regularity. He did not travel and rarely changed his daily routine. The latter was described in the following words by his son-in-law, Eduard Zeller:

Through summer and winter, he got up at four o'clock. In the winter, he normally worked for some hours in the unheated room to spare the servants, even though, as would happen in particularly cold nights, the ink in his inkpot might freeze. From then, his regular walks after lunch and in the evening were the only lengthy interruptions of his learned pursuit.<sup>10</sup>

Baur seems to have spent the first four or five years of his professoriate mostly on his teaching duties. Lecture manuscripts that are extant among his papers have been prepared with the utmost diligence. Baur wrote these notes in continuous text not, as was common, in short paragraphs on which the lecturer would extemporaneously comment. In fact, these "notes," fully annotated, looked more like book manuscripts ready for publication.

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<sup>6</sup>For a similar agenda, cf. Philipp Marheineke, *Die Grundlehren der christlichen Dogmatik als Wissenschaft*, 2nd edn. (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1827), xi–xxvii.

<sup>7</sup>F. C. Baur, "Letter to Friedrich August Baur of July 26, 1823," in *Briefe*, part 1: *Die frühen Briefe (1814–1835)*, ed. Carl E. Hester (Sigmaringen: Thorbecke, 1993), 31–6, esp. 33–4.

<sup>8</sup>F. D. E. Schleiermacher, "Über die Glaubenslehre: Zwei Sendschreiben an Lücke (1829)," in *Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, vol. I/10, ed. Hans-Friedrich Traulsen and Martin Ohst (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1990), 307–94, here: 314, 11–28; 362, 12–18.

<sup>9</sup>Friedrich Creuzer, *Symbolik und Mythologie der alten Völker, besonders der Griechen*, 3rd edn., vol. 1 (Leipzig/Darmstadt: Leske, 1837), xv.

<sup>10</sup>Eduard Zeller, "Ferdinand Christian Baur (1861)," in *Vorträge und Abhandlungen geschichtlichen Inhalts* (Leipzig: Fues, 1865), 354–434, here: 363.

As a result of this punctilious approach, Baur did not publish much until the early 1830s, but from that point onwards, his productivity grew continuously for at least the next fifteen years. Only in the last decade of his life, from around 1847, did he become more concerned to gather his ideas into their final, summary form, most notably through the publication of his multi-volume *Church History* including his celebrated account of the early Church in *Christianity and the Christian Church of the First Three Centuries* (first published in 1853).

The great external caesura in Baur's life occurred in the year 1835. By that time, Baur had gathered around himself a growing crop of promising, young scholars—from the 1840s they would be called the Tübingen School.<sup>11</sup> One of them was David Friedrich Strauss (1808–74). The precocious Strauss published in 1835, aged only twenty-eight, *The Life of Jesus (Das Leben Jesu kritisch bearbeitet)*, in two volumes.<sup>12</sup> The book, which argued for an interpretation of the gospel story as myth and used Hegelian ideas to compensate for the historical critique, caused one of the fiercest public controversies in nineteenth-century Germany.<sup>13</sup> Strauss' own academic career could not be salvaged, and soon enough Baur himself became implicated in the attacks of Strauss' opponents as well.

Baur's self-defense was complicated by the fact that he did not, in fact, agree with Strauss' mythical interpretation.<sup>14</sup> Whether in the ensuing controversy he always chose the right nuance of expression has been variously assessed.<sup>15</sup> There is, however, no doubt that the consequences for Baur himself were severe. While he could not be deprived of his professorial post, he was now, for much of traditional German Christianity, tainted as the mentor of a radical detractor of the gospel truth. He had no sway outside Tübingen and could not support any of his students in finding appointments. At the end of his life, Baur appears as a lone voice in an ecclesiastical and theological world that had decidedly and aggressively turned away from the ideas he embodied. None of his former students held a chair in a Theological Faculty. The only seeming exception to this rule, Albrecht Ritschl (1822–89), had publicly terminated his attachment to his former academic teacher.<sup>16</sup>

## THEOLOGY AND THE HISTORY OF RELIGIONS

In 1819, F. C. Baur published his first known text, a lengthy review of a *Biblical Theology* by a certain G. P. C. Kaiser.<sup>17</sup> Despite the title, Kaiser's book was an attempt to inscribe the biblical stories into the broader frame of a history of religion. Baur disagreed with most details of Kaiser's

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<sup>11</sup>KGNJ, 398–9; CTNC, 367–8.

<sup>12</sup>David Friedrich Strauss, *Das Leben Jesu kritisch bearbeitet*, 2 vols. (Tübingen: Osiander, 1835/6). English translation: *The Life of Jesus Critically Examined*, trans. Maryann Evans [= George Eliot] 3 vols. (London: Chapman brothers, 1846). NB: The English text translates the fourth German edition.

<sup>13</sup>Baur's own account of this controversy remains one of the best: CTNC, 333–50.

<sup>14</sup>Zachhuber, *Theology as Science*, 92.

<sup>15</sup>Ulrich Köpf, "Ferdinand Christian Baur and David Friedrich Strauss," in *Ferdinand Christian Baur and the History of Early Christianity*, ed. Martin Bauspieß, Christof Landmesser, and David Lincicum (Oxford: OUP, 2017), 3–44; esp. 19–22.

<sup>16</sup>Johannes Zachhuber, "Theology and History in the Controversy between Albrecht Ritschl and Eduard Zeller," in *Theology, History and the Modern University*, ed. Michael DeJonge and Kevin Vander Schel (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2021), 125–47, here: 128–30.

<sup>17</sup>F. C. Baur, "G. P. C. Kaiser, *Die Biblische Theologie, oder Judaismus und Christianismus nach der grammatisch-historischen Interpretationsmethode, und nach einer freimüthigen Stellung in die kritische-vergleichende Universalgeschichte der Religionen und in die universale Religion* (Erlangen: Palm, 1813–14)," in *Archiv für die Theologie und ihre neueste Literatur*, ed. Ernst Gottlieb Bengel, 2:3 (1818): 656–717.

account, but he emphatically *endorsed* the principle that Christian theology can only proceed from the recognition that Christianity as historical reality must be understood as embedded in a history that began long before its emergence in first-century Palestine. In 1853, toward the end of his career, Baur opened his pivotal *Christianity and the Church of the First Three Centuries* by restating this same principle:

The historian who enters upon the object of his presentation with the faith of the church is confronted at the very outset with the miracle of all miracles, the primal fact of Christianity—that the only-begotten son of God descended to earth from the eternal throne of the Godhead and became human in the womb of the Virgin. Whoever regards this as simply and absolutely a miracle immediately steps completely outside the nexus of history. [...] Therefore a truly historical examination or reflection [*die geschichtliche Betrachtung*] very naturally is concerned to draw the miracle of the absolute beginning into the historical nexus and to resolve it, insofar as possible, into its natural elements.<sup>18</sup>

This basic continuity is central for understanding the main, internal impulse of Baur's work. The historical perspective, he observed, required contextualization, but this requirement clashes with religious intuitions at the very heart of the Christian faith. How can this faith be unique and uniquely true as a religion if it cannot be insulated from the "historical nexus" of history and its "natural elements"?

Kaiser's response to this question was typical for the theological rationalism predominant in Protestant faculties at the turn of the nineteenth century. According to him, the absolute religion of, as he called it, "universalism" was not historic Christianity. Rather, it was the religion of reason which had only fully come to the fore in enlightened Europe but could, in its essentials, be discovered across the entire history of religions.<sup>19</sup>

Baur disagreed with this solution for at least two reasons. First, insofar as Christian theology had the task of providing an intellectual justification of Christianity's uniqueness, Enlightenment theology with its ideal of rational religion was essentially bad theology. Second, rationalism also lacked rigor in its understanding of history. If religion as such had to be understood in a historical framework, how could the absolute religion of reason somehow exist outside history?<sup>20</sup>

In many ways, Baur's subsequent work can be understood as a series of attempts to find alternative answers to what he found unsatisfactory in theological authors such as Kaiser. His guiding assumptions in these attempts seem to have been the same from the very beginning:

1. The historical study of Christianity has to follow the same principles as historical study in general. In his earliest lecture course of Church History, written probably in 1827, Baur noted blandly that Church History had to work by the same method "that is valid for history as such, since Church History is merely one part of general world history."<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup>CCK, 1; CCC, 3.

<sup>19</sup>Baur, "Kaiser Review," 660.

<sup>20</sup>In his later work, Baur occasionally went further to claim that rationalism was fundamentally "ahistorical." Cf. Zachhuber, *Theology as Science*, 55.

<sup>21</sup>F. C. Baur, *Kirchengeschichte*, unpublished lecture manuscript, undated [1827?], Tübinger Universitätsbibliothek, Mh II 166 h, 19.

2. Principle no. 1 is misunderstood, however, if it is taken to imply the absence of philosophical reflection. Historical facts need interpretation, and the use of philosophical methods to this end (we might use the word “hermeneutical” here) is no violation of the historical approach.
3. The most fundamental concepts in religious history are nature and spirit (*Geist*). Religions either identify the divine with nature or juxtapose the two. The former is generally the case in “paganism” (nature religion), the latter in Judaism (spirit religion). As both have their partial truth, they can only be truly overcome in a religion that affirms both God’s identity with spirit *and* his intimate connection with nature, that is, the religion of the Incarnation, Christianity.
4. Religious history, thus understood, reveals itself as the gradual progression from nature religion (*Naturreligion*) via spirit religion (*Geistreligion*) to absolute religious truth which is reached in Christianity. Historical study can thus reaffirm traditional Christian beliefs albeit not without transforming their older, dogmatic form.

These ideas underlay Baur’s *Symbolik und Mythologie oder die Naturreligion des Alterthums* (1824/5). As indicated by the study’s subtitle, Baur’s twist to the continuing debate about mythology was its identification as the “nature religion of antiquity” which, he explained in his preface, could only be understood from its contrast with Christianity (see Chapter 1 in this *Reader*).<sup>22</sup>

When his research turned to Gnosticism, from the late 1820s, his fundamental set of ideas remained the same. Gnosticism, he argued, became so important to Christianity because it is the “Christian philosophy of religion”—the subtitle to Baur’s *Christian Gnosis* (1835). As such, however, it is thoroughly historical. Gnostics are only philosophers of religion insofar as they are, at the same time, historians of religion. They gain their understanding of religious truth from a comparison of pagan, Jewish, and Christian ideas. Christianity’s absoluteness is established insofar as it brings together nature and spirit in the Incarnation.<sup>23</sup>

*Christian Gnosis*, however, also displays a stubborn problem Baur himself was unable to solve. While he saw the Gnostics as following his own script of a historically inflected philosophy of religion, he also diagnosed their fundamental failure in doing so. Their Christology, after all, was docetic; Christ’s Incarnation did not *really* take place. The savior was the spiritual principle smuggled under cover into the material world to bring home those held captive there against their will.<sup>24</sup>

Christianity, then, did not gain an appropriate philosophy of religion at the outset. Or perhaps it did, but not in those heretical groups? Baur clearly did not think that orthodox Christianity in the Patristic period had better answers to offer; instead, it developed into an institution whose members were duty-bound to accept the dogmatic claims of their Church. What would happen, however, once this authoritarian shell cracked? This, Baur believed, had occurred in modernity whose descent into rationalism and supranaturalism—one as indefensible as the other—only served to highlight the intellectual insufficiency of traditional theology.

The main task, then, was still to be accomplished, and Baur—at least in his early years—was evidently optimistic that Christianity stood at the cusp of a major new, doctrinal breakthrough.

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<sup>22</sup>SuM, vi–vii.

<sup>23</sup>DCG, 21; CG, 9.

<sup>24</sup>DCG, 260–1; CG, 154–5. On the broader problem see Zachhuber, *Theology as Science*, 47–50.

Its signs were everywhere but particularly in the emergence of a slate of new philosophies which, he thought, offered to theology conceptual tools promising substantive progress in tackling the issues it had never before been able to solve.

## THEOLOGY AND PHILOSOPHY

It may surprise some that Baur's relationship to the philosophies of his time is only broached at this point. After all, it is one of the most abiding clichés about the theologian that he was the major representative of Hegelianism within historical theology. There is some truth to such an assessment. As we have seen, Baur was insistent that historical analysis was incomplete without a philosophical element. "Without philosophy, history remains to me forever dead and dumb," as he confessed at the outset of *Symbolik und Mythologie*.<sup>25</sup> It is also the case that Baur looked to philosophers for guidance. He was always conscious that his own vocation was not the independent development of philosophical insight but its critical use within historical theology.

"Critical," however, is the operative word here. Baur was never beholden to any particular philosophy, however much such a caricature suited his many detractors. As for Hegel, Baur seems to have been unaware of his philosophy until the posthumous publication, in 1832, of his *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*.<sup>26</sup> As we have seen, however, the principal outlines of his thought had been fixed at that time for at least a decade.

The root of Baur's fascination for the contemporaneous, idealist philosophies followed directly from his analysis of theology's predicament. Overcoming the staid opposition of rationalism and supranaturalism required a new interpretation of history. Precisely such an interpretation of history, however, had been at the center of philosophical activity in Germany since the final decade of the eighteenth century. Kant notoriously left behind a tension between the rigid dualism of phenomenon and noumenon as established in the *Critique of Pure Reason* on the one hand, and the absoluteness of his moral metaphysics as contained in his writings on practical philosophy, on the other. Insofar as "can implies ought," however, the latter had to impact the empirical world as well in a way that seemed to violate the dualisms of the first critique.

Kant himself intimated in some later writings that this tension could be mitigated through a philosophy of history, which would show how humankind's development would successively transform nature in accordance with the principles of practical reason.<sup>27</sup> These cautious hints were eagerly adopted by the following generation of thinkers including F. W. J. Schelling and Friedrich Schleiermacher. Both introduced history into philosophy as the medium in which the dualities of natural determination and spiritual freedom would come together. In this connection, religion and especially Christianity played a crucial part.

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<sup>25</sup>SuM, xi.

<sup>26</sup>G. W. F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Religion, nebst einer Schrift über die Beweise vom Dasein Gottes*, ed. Philipp Marheineke, in *G. W. F. Hegel's Werke, herausgegeben durch einen Verein von Freunden des Verewigten*, vols. 11–12 (Berlin: Duncker & Humblodt, 1832).

<sup>27</sup>Cf. Emil Fackenheim, "Kant's Concept of History," in *The God Within: Kant, Schelling, and Historicity*, ed. J. W. Burbidge (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994), 34–49.

In his *Lectures on Academic Study* (1803), Schelling identified theology as the meeting ground of philosophy and history:

Since it [sc. theology], as the true centre of the objective realization of philosophy, deals chiefly in speculative ideas, it is also the highest synthesis of philosophical and historical knowing.<sup>28</sup>

The reason for this particular significance of theology does not only lie in the fact that Christianity like all religions is historical in character. Rather, Schelling perceived another, “absolute relationship” between Christianity and history:

The absolute relation of theology is that in Christianity the world is looked upon as history, as the realm of morals, and that this general intuition constitutes its fundamental character.<sup>29</sup>

Christianity, Schelling claimed, is not merely historical in an incidental sense, it is emphatically historical because it raises history to the level of the Absolute. While Greek religion was nature religion, Christianity is religion of the spirit, of morality, and thus of history. It is the religion in which “the divine principle has ceased to reveal itself in nature, and is recognised only in history.”<sup>30</sup>

We know from an early letter that Baur was deeply impressed by Schelling’s philosophy at this point in his career.<sup>31</sup> His writing in *Symbolik und Mythologie* is deeply infused with terms and concepts of a Schellingian ring. At the same time, it is not difficult to see that he could not, in the long run, be content with Schelling’s approach which consciously stopped short of endorsing a speculative philosophy, let alone a theology of history in the sense Baur intuited it, namely, as integrating the plurality of historical events into a single, progressive narrative.<sup>32</sup> History, to Schelling, always remained empirical and thus incapable of being synthesized in support of theological principles.

The same could be said for Schleiermacher, whose *Christian Faith* Baur read soon after its first publication. A letter to his brother from 1823 speaks of the profound impression this text made on him. Yet even at that early point, Baur averred that Schleiermacher did not go far enough in that he merely inscribed Christianity into the history of religions without offering proof that it *was* the absolute religion. Crucially, in his Christology, Schleiermacher retained the dualism of (intra-mental) self-consciousness and the external reality of history, thus foregoing the opportunities offered by a speculative interpretation of the Incarnation.<sup>33</sup>

Hegel’s thought is first referenced in Baur’s literary engagement with Johann Adam Möhler,<sup>34</sup> but it is *Christian Gnosis* which shows the full effect it had on Baur’s thought. There is no doubt

<sup>28</sup>F. W. J. Schelling, “Vorlesungen über die Methode des akademischen Studiums (1803),” in *Sämmtliche Werke*, vol. I/5, ed. K. F. A. Schelling (Stuttgart: Cotta, 1859), 207–311, here: 286; English translation: *Lectures on University Study*, trans. Ella S. Morgan, in *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy* 12 (1878), 205–13, here: 205.

<sup>29</sup>Schelling, *Lectures*, 287; English Text: 206.

<sup>30</sup>Schelling, *Vorlesungen*, 289; English Text: 208.

<sup>31</sup>F. C. Baur, “Letter to Ludwig Bauer of November 2, 1822,” in *Frühe Briefe*, 26–7.

<sup>32</sup>Cf. Christian Danz, “Geschichte als fortschreitende Offenbarung Gottes: Überlegungen zu Schellings Geschichtsphilosophie,” in *System als Wirklichkeit: 200 Jahre Schellings “System des Transzendentalen Idealismus,”* ed. Christian Danz, C. Dierksmeier and C. Seysen (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2001), 69–82.

<sup>33</sup>Baur, “Letter to Friedrich August Baur.”

<sup>34</sup>Cf. GKP, 431–2. See Chapter 13 in this volume.

that Baur here discovered the conceptual tools for which he had long been searching.<sup>35</sup> Hegel’s “objective” interpretation of history as the process of spirit unfolding itself in and through historical development was, so to speak, the key to the lock Baur had been trying to open. There is no doubt, furthermore, that this Hegelian inspiration only enabled Baur’s subsequent, decisive advances in the history of dogma.

Yet Baur’s appropriation of Hegel’s philosophy was never uncritical. In *Christian Gnosis*, he is clear that the principal problem diagnosed in ancient Gnosticism, the separation of the historical and the spiritual saviour, remained unsolved in Hegel’s philosophy. Consequently, he never lost the suspicion that Hegel’s philosophy led to a level of speculation for which history would, once again, become insignificant. He observes that, according to Hegel,

Christ is God-man only by the mediation of faith. [The question of] what lies behind faith, however, as the historically given, objective reality which was the basis from which the merely external, historical view could turn into faith, remains shrouded in a mystery which we ought not [attempt to] penetrate.<sup>36</sup>

Baur’s work has often been divided into three phases: an early one prior to his acquaintance with Hegel; a second, Hegelian one; and a third one, beginning in the mid-forties, during which Hegel’s influence once again recedes.<sup>37</sup> Such a scheme, however, is misleading. Baur’s fundamental concerns remained the same throughout much of his career. Hegel’s philosophy was *adopted* into the service of an agenda that had been set a decade earlier. While it propelled forwards Baur’s work in several areas, it never came to total domination. For that reason, too, the waning of Hegel’s influence—in line with his overall eclipse in German intellectual life from the mid-1840s—is less of a sharp caesura than often claimed.

## HISTORY OF DOGMA

After publishing *Christian Gnosis*, Baur was confronted with the obvious question of what, exactly, the Christian philosophy of religion conducted in a historical framework wider than Christianity itself had to do with theology. Baur sought to clarify the problem in a lengthy essay, “On the Concept of the Philosophy of Religion” (Chapter 3 in this volume). According to his argument, the philosophy of religion must always proceed through historical comparison, but theology can turn more exclusively to the Christian dogma. The latter, he held, was the Christian religion looked at from the insight; its study, we might say, considered the architecture of Christianity.<sup>38</sup>

Yet dogma, too, has its history; when it comes to the study of this history, the scholar is once again in a field much closer to the history of religion. In fact, Baur seems to suggest that the history of dogma really is a subdiscipline of the history of religion and treated separately mostly because of its more specific subject matter.

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<sup>35</sup>On Hegel’s influence on Baur, cf. Martin Wendte, “Ferdinand Christian Baur: A Historically Informed Idealist of a Distinctive Kind,” in *Ferdinand Christian Baur and the History of Early Christianity*, ed. Martin Bauspieß, Christof Landmesser and David Lincicum (Oxford: OUP, 2017), 67–80.

<sup>36</sup>DCG, 712; CG, 442. See below, Chapter 2.

<sup>37</sup>Horton Harris, *Tübingen School*, 158; Fraedrich, *Baur*, xiv.

<sup>38</sup>BdR, 372.



History of dogma at the time was still a young discipline. While Baur was conscious of seventeenth-century pioneers, notably the Jesuit Denys Pétau,<sup>39</sup> he felt the development of this discipline was part and parcel of theology's novel mission in his own time. It is arguable that no other discipline, with the exception of New Testament studies, bears the lasting imprint of Baur's work as much as the history of dogma.

Baur's main writings in the field cover the decade from 1838, when *The Doctrine of Reconciliation* appeared, to 1847, which saw the first edition of *History of Christian Dogma*, intended as the authoritative summary treatment of the discipline. His relevant publications from that period cover over 4,000 pages—3,000 alone in the three volumes of his *Doctrine of the Triune God*—indicating the sheer amount of primary material Baur incorporated into his studies. More important than these impressive figures, however, is Baur's ability to weave the disparate historical facts into a more or less coherent narrative.

This narrative flowed directly from *Christian Gnosis*. Religion had there been defined as culminating in the idea of the reconciliation of nature and spirit. Christianity was the absolute religion because it offered this reconciliation in the idea—and the historical reality—of the God-man. Yet the precise understanding of this truth was not immediately given. The history of dogma, then, is the process by which Christianity came to consciousness of its deepest principle. From this it followed that the first object of Baur's study was the doctrine of atonement or reconciliation itself. Immediately connected with it, however, were the doctrines of the Trinity and the Incarnation which Baur, interestingly, saw as twin doctrines and, therefore, treated in a single work.

There is no doubting the significance of Hegel's philosophy for this entire area of Baur's work. From Hegel he learned to think of dogma in its "objective" reality, that is, to identify the vanishing point from which the perspective of the various theologians and their doctrinal topics becomes one and the same. The history of dogma is thus really what the name suggests, the historical unfolding of Christian doctrine, rather than the enumeration of opinions held by authors across the centuries. Even in *History of Christian Dogma*, where the Hegelian orientation overall recedes more into the background, Baur is adamant about this point:

It is dogma itself that in its various specifications sets out its content and positions the content over against itself, splitting itself up internally, so that the concept, which is its substantial being itself, may be released into the distinction of its moments and then drawn back into its unity. A choice must be made: if the changes portrayed by the history of dogma are not simply a contingent and arbitrary fluctuation, then this history can only be viewed as an intellectual or spiritual process in which the essential nature of spirit itself is revealed, for dogma itself is essentially intellectual or spiritual in nature. Thus the method of the history of dogma can only be the objective nature of the subject matter itself.<sup>40</sup>

Few if any later students of the discipline were willing to adopt this perspective *tout court*. Baur's noted colleague, Isaak August Dorner, and his sometime student, Albrecht Ritschl, fundamentally diverged from Baur's insistence that dogma only moves toward its perfection during the course of Christian history by insisting that Christian perfection existed in the original period of "primitive

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<sup>39</sup>Baur, *Vorlesungen über die christliche Dogmengeschichte*, vol. 1., ed. Ferdinand Friedrich Baur (Leipzig: Fues, 1865), 112. Cf. LD, 30–4; HCD, 70–2.

<sup>40</sup>LD, 7–8; HCD, 53. See Chapter 4 in this volume.

Christianity.” Adolf Harnack, the most influential Ritschlian historian, saw the emergence of dogma from the outset as a problematic, albeit inevitable development and, consequently, envisaged an undogmatic future for the Church. Despite these sharp disagreements, however, none of Baur’s successors could fully escape from the long shadow cast by his work on the history of dogma. Both his overall vision and the impressive extent of his treatment of the sources ensured Baur’s abiding influence over the subsequent development of the discipline.

## NEW TESTAMENT STUDIES

As we have seen, Baur was adamant that theology could not insulate itself from history. He was under no illusion that the most neuralgic point in this regard, especially within Protestantism, was the history recorded in the Bible and, especially, the New Testament. He early on decided that theology could make biblical studies an exception to its general historicization only at the peril of losing its credibility. In his exchange with Möhler, he was explicit that abandoning the rigid Scripture principle was as necessary on the Protestant side as the Catholic departure from extraneous authoritarianism.<sup>41</sup>

Yet while he published important works in the field from the early 1830s, it took him longer to gain his own, definitive perspective. With hindsight, he wrote that he was unable to take a more determined stance in the controversy about Strauss’ *Life of Jesus* because at that point he had not yet achieved his own, considered view of the matter.<sup>42</sup> Whether or not this was partly said to deflect the criticism that he failed to stand up for his former student, there is no doubt that Baur’s major, monographic publications in New Testament Studies fall in the 1840s.

Beginning already in the early 1830s, Baur demonstrated the hallmarks of the approach that was to mark his contribution to New Testament scholarship. In his 1831 essay on the “Christ party” at Corinth, he undertook a patient, critical sifting of the received sources as he puzzled at length over the identification of the nebulous group seemingly referred to in 1 Cor 1:12.<sup>43</sup> Dissatisfied with previous approaches, but taking up elements of their solutions, Baur found behind Paul’s description of parties at Corinth the reflection of a rift in earliest Christianity: between Pauline, Gentile-friendly, law-free Christianity on the one hand, and Petrine, Jewish-Christian, law-observant Christianity on the other. The conviction that tensions not only marked early Christianity but also drove its development became a key insight in Baur’s interpretative work.

Alongside his discovery of the productive nature of disagreement, Baur also became convinced that criticism could not simply be a “negative” exercise, discrediting traditional views about the authenticity, integrity, or historical accuracy of a canonical text. Rather, criticism worthy of the name needed to offer a positive conception of a text’s place in the totality of early Christianity.<sup>44</sup> Schleiermacher had called into question the authenticity of 1 Timothy in 1807,<sup>45</sup> but Baur’s own

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<sup>41</sup>KGP, 424–9; partly in Chapter 13 in this volume.

<sup>42</sup>KGNJ, 397; see Chapter 12 in this volume.

<sup>43</sup>CPKG.

<sup>44</sup>See Chapters 7 and 14 in this volume.

<sup>45</sup>F. D. E. Schleiermacher, *Über den sogenannten ersten Brief des Paulos an den Timotheos. Ein kritisches Sendschreibung an J. C. Gass* (Berlin: Realschulbuchhandlung, 1807) [= F. D. E. Schleiermacher, *Schriften aus der Hallenser Zeit (1804–1807)*, ed. Hermann Patsch and Kritische Gesamtausgabe, vol. I/5 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1995), 153–242].