

# Week 6: Constructing Modern Theology: Baur, Ritschl, Troeltsch

- Theology had to respond to radical criticism of Strauss, Feuerbach, Marx.
- Antiliberal reaction during 1850s fails to produce lasting theological achievements.
- Instead: attempts at reconstructing theology in the face of modern objections, philosophical and historical.
- Theology as product of the modern research university: collaboration of specialists, existence of 'schools'.

# 1. Ferdinand Christian Baur (1792-1860)



# Some Reading

- P.C Hodgson (ed.), *F.Chr. Baur on the Writing of Church History*, 1968 (selection of primary texts)
- R. Morgan, 'FCB' in: N. Smart et al. (eds.), *Nineteenth Century Religious Thought in the West*, 1985
- H. Harris, *The Tübingen School*, 1975 (new edition 1990)

# Baur II

- On his own method in *Symbolism and Mythology* (1824):
- There are two ways of historical thought: 'either that of a completely analytical splitting up of phenomena which, ultimately, leads to atomism, fatalism and atheism, or that in which we perceive the intellectual life of the nations in its coherence as one great whole, thus obtaining an ever more sublime idea of the divine. ... I am not scared of the well-worn charge of mixing philosophy and history. Without philosophy, history for me is dead.'

# Baur III

- Baur assumed that we can bring history and theology together by establishing an overarching concept within which history loses its arbitrariness.
- Christianity must be placed within the history of religions.
- Philosophy of religion must demonstrate what religion is.
- → This demonstration can only be achieved working historically; historical, philosophical and theological work go hand in hand.

# Baur IV

- Religions generally try to achieve salvation for human beings.
- Humans are both 'natural' and 'spiritual' beings.
- Salvation means the solution of this conflict.
- → Types of Religion:
- 'nature religion' identifies God with nature (paganism).
- Monotheism (Judaism) identifies God with the transcendent, spiritual principle.
- 'Absolute religion' must bind the two principles together → idea of the incarnation central.

# Baur V

- Incarnation must be 'real', i.e. historical.
- Christianity as the religion of the incarnation needs a historical, not a mythological foundation.
- If proved, the reality of the incarnation would both confirm the claims of Christianity and transform history into a meaningful unity.
- In spite of these intentions, Baur remained deeply sceptical about this possibility.

# Baur VI

- His critical investigations of all the 'philosophical theologians' from Gnosticism to Schleiermacher and Hegel reveals their Christological failure.
- This is often presented as inevitable:
- 'Between the one who is best, relatively, and the one who is absolutely perfect there is a gulf which history can never cross.'
- Result: Deeply ambiguous concept; philosophical and theological idealism, but historical relativism.



# Albrecht Ritschl (1822-1889)



# Reading

- A. Ritschl, *The Christian Doctrine of Justification and Reconciliation*, 3 vol. (major work)
- D.L. Mueller, *An Introduction to the Theology of Albrecht Ritschl* 1969
- J. Richmond, *Ritschl, A Reappraisal* 1978

# Ritschl II

- Initially member of Tubingen School; emphasis on combination of history and theology.
- Break with Baur over the dating of NT writings (1856).
- An early date for most NT writings makes it plausible to consider 'primitive Christianity' a separate historical unit.
- This remains normative for Christianity.

# Ritschl III

- Central is the notion of 'kingdom of God'.
- This is the core of the preaching of Jesus, the goal for human development, but also the aim of God's loving will.
- Salvation for Ritschl is reconciliation of men with God and among each other in this 'kingdom of God'.
- In reality this has been 'founded' by Jesus → importance of the Church.

# Ritschl IV

- Religion is necessarily a communal activity.
- But the 'kingdom of God' is misunderstood by evangelicals and religious socialists who juxtapose it to real society.
- Christians are members of this realm if they act according to the principle of love within their private and public lives.
- Ritschl's ethics thus has a distinctly 'bourgeois' touch.

# Ernst Troeltsch (1865-1923)



# Troeltsch II

- Reading: E.T., *The Absoluteness of Christianity and the History of Religions* (1901)
- Id., *The Social Teachings of the Christian Churches*
- Id., *Christian Thought. Its History and Applications* (1923)
- M. Chapman, *Ernst Troeltsch and Liberal Theology* (2001)
- S. Coakley, *Christ without Absolutes* (1988)

# Troeltsch III

- Saw the Ritschlian synthesis of theology and history as faulty.
- Historical thought could never be married with traditional doctrine.
- Troeltsch on 'historical and dogmatic method' (1898):
  - Three principles of historical research:
  - Criticism; analogy; correlation.
  - They make impossible the certitude and uniqueness which faith ascribes to one particular point in history.



# Troeltsch IV

- Troeltsch's view on the futility of 'historical theology' foreshadow the position of Barth and others after WW I.
- But Troeltsch did not think that theology could escape from the 'fate' of historicism.
- It needed to expose itself to this ordeal and search for a future beyond it.