

PREFACE

IN 1994 I published a short book, *A Tale of Two Missions* (soon to be republished in America under the title *St. Paul versus St. Peter*). It was intended for a broad audience, offering an explanation of the situation behind our New Testament and some documents from the second century. I therefore eschewed footnotes and pledged my respectability merely by listing a dozen articles I had published on the subject in learned journals and Festschriften. But sensing that I would not be likely to carry my professional colleagues with so brief an array of arguments, I added a defiant and ill-considered note in the introduction: “If they would prefer an 800-page statement, I am preparing one.”

Reflection soon made clear that neither I nor anyone could hope to examine the entire New Testament, let alone the second-century documents, and offer a new and satisfying explanation in a mere eight hundred pages. Besides, my explanation was not entirely new. It was a much revised and elaborated form of a theory going back to the eighteenth century and made notorious by Ferdinand Christian Baur. Almost all scholars had been taught in their youth that it was based on a fundamental fallacy, and there was, in consequence, a heavy weight of prejudice against it that I would need to overcome. I saw, therefore, that I would have to concentrate attention on a limited part of the subject.

Baur’s theory and mine supposes that behind the New Testament lies a basic rivalry between two missions, that is, two evangelizing communities sending out a series of emissaries to win converts to the Christian faith: the one headed in the 40s and 50s C.E. by James (Jesus’ brother), Peter, and John; and the other by Paul. Galatians 2.7–8 refers to this dichotomy in so many words: “but when they saw that I had been entrusted with the gospel to the uncircumcision, just as Peter had been with that to the circumcision, for he who worked in Peter for the mission to the circumcision worked also in me for the Gentiles.” There is evidence that some such rivalry underlies the letters to the Galatians, the Romans, and the Philippians. First Thessalonians is too early, and Philemon too short, for us to expect any such controversy. But our major Pauline documentation is the twenty-nine-chapter correspondence with the Corinthian church, and it is here that the attacks

on Baur have been concentrated. Where, it has been asked, is the mention of circumcision, so hotly disputed in the other three letters? Why is there no discussion of the law? Where, apart from one or two neutral references, is there any mention of James and Peter?

The first topic to be tackled, therefore, was the Corinthian letters, with a determined effort to find out who the opposition were and if they were the same in both Epistles. My conclusion is that in fact the opponents were, in both letters, evangelists sent by the “pillars” in Jerusalem. We need a name for such people, and in some ways it would be most accurate to speak of them as Jacobites, since James was the moving spirit behind them. But 1 Cor 1.12¹ suggests that they spoke of themselves as “of Cephas,” and Paul responds to this appellation. So it has seemed best to let them have their own self-identification, and I have called them the Petrines.

There will need to be a second volume to my apologia, if I live so long. I have argued here that the issues that divided Paul and the Petrines were far from limited to the law and circumcision. They extended to many practices in everyday life, such as attitudes about sex, work, money, idol food, and the behavior of women, and to major doctrinal issues such as the incarnation, the atonement, the resurrection, and the Parousia. It should be possible to trace, without trespassing into a third volume, the development of these disputes in the century following Paul.

I am grateful to the editor of *Novum Testamentum* for permission to reprint passages from my article “Libertines?” (1999), in ch. 8. The reader should note that the translations of the NT and other Greek texts are usually my own.

I would like to record my thanks to colleagues who have helpfully criticized parts of my thesis, especially in Britain and in Scandinavia; to Professor Kingsley Barrett for help and encouragement; to Dr. Christine Trevett, Dr. Stephen Chester, and above all to my Birmingham colleagues and friends David Parker and Mark Goodacre.

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¹Hereafter such citations to 1 and 2 Corinthians will usually be expressed in a shorthand format so that 1 Cor 1.12 will be merely I,1.12.