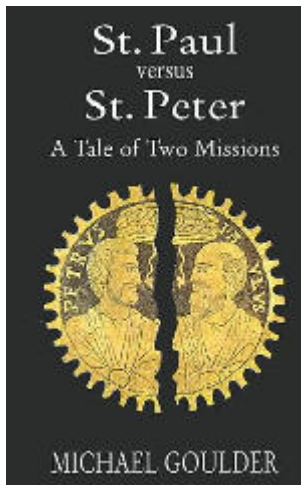


RBL 06/26/2000



Goulder, Michael

St. Paul versus St. Peter: A Tale of Two Missions

Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1994. Pp. xii + 196,
Paperback, \$15.99, ISBN 0664255612.

Steven C. Muir
University of Ottawa
Ottawa, ON Canada K1N 6N5

Michael Goulder is Professor of Biblical Studies at the University of Birmingham in England. The author's intention, stated in the Introduction, is to present his theory in a form accessible to the general reader. To this end he has left out all footnotes, and his prose is at times informal.

While this intent is worthwhile, in this reviewer's opinion the method of implementation produces a book at cross-purposes with itself. Goulder presents a clearly stated and impressively thorough analysis of NT evidence supporting the "Two-Missions" theory first proposed by F. C. Baur in 1831. Many of the intended readers may find Goulder's discussion of selected primary sources to be more detailed than they are prepared to work through. On the other hand, the specialist in Christian origins or the NT who reads this book is frustrated time and again by the lack of a scholarly apparatus. There is almost no reference to the standard theories or findings of other researchers: for example, Goulder's discussion of Paul on the Law is innocent of E. P. Sanders, his analysis of wandering Christian charismatics does not mention Gerd Theissen, and his theory of Paul's attitude towards mysticism ignores Alan Segal. Goulder's bibliography, which should have directed uninformed readers to basic works in the area, contains references only to his own articles in scholarly journals. Readers are referred (p. 195) to these articles if they wish to see more detailed arguments and references to opposing opinions. For now, the reader is left only with Goulder's discussion. Goulder alludes (p. xi) to an 800-page

document in the works; it appears that scholars wishing to see something more rigorous will have to wait for that book.

Goulder presents a detailed case for Baur's Two-Mission theory: first and early second-century Christianity was set within a struggle between two competing and at times antagonistic factions, Pauline and Petrine. Goulder surveys the entire NT corpus and cites considerable evidence that this competition was the context behind most, if not all, of the texts. The Petrine group was Jewish-Christian, Jerusalem-oriented, led by Peter and then James, charismatic, rigorously Torah-observant, with an adoptionist Christology. The Pauline group was primarily Gentile-Christian, Diaspora-oriented, led by Paul, mundane (oriented towards ethics and practical matters), indifferent to most aspects of Jewish ceremonial Law, and convinced of the full and simultaneous divinity and humanity of Jesus. Goulder's statement on p. 157 (concerning the perennially thorny issue of how the term "Son of Man" would have been understood in first-century Palestine) is typical of his general approach to NT exegesis in this book: "So there is the solution to a long-standing enigma: the Two Missions hypothesis is a master-key to open every lock."

The idea that any single theory or set of circumstances can explain all NT texts is, at the least, optimistic. It is undeniable that many NT texts have an underlying context of conflict, even polemic. It is arguable, however, whether the same group or groups are being engaged in each case. Goulder casts the net very widely and is able to fit a wide spectrum of characteristics into the profile of each of the two putative groups. But the nagging question remains: Is it not more likely that different groups were in conflict in different locations? Goulder sets out to challenge the depiction of early Christianity as a strongly unified movement, with occasional off-shoots into heresy. The general public may hold such a notion, and they are the stated audience of this book. Most scholars, however, recognize that Christianity in the first and second centuries consisted of a number of diverse, at times even isolated groups. Goulder's funneling of this considerable diversity into two camps he identifies as "Petrine" and "Pauline" over-simplifies the various groups, and it does not adequately inform the general reader of the situation.

Goulder states (with a nod to other scholars) that he has chosen to consider only certain primary documents: the NT and some later writers, particularly Eusebius. He rules out hypothetical sources such as Q or proto-Thomas because he does not believe in them (p. x). He gives no explanation, however, why he has not considered texts that do exist, such as Gnostic, pseudepigraphal, or apocryphal Christian writings. Although these may be of a later date than the first-century NT texts he uses, Goulder has no qualms about drawing on second-century "orthodox" texts to support his thesis. One likely explanation for the selective use of sources is that the evidence from them is difficult to place within a dualistic Petrine/Pauline schema.

The author's sympathies appear to lie with the Pauline camp. Although Goulder gives guardedly approving recognition of the Petrines as religious virtuosos, the majority of his commendations go to the Paulines with their quiet determination to lead a faith-oriented (rather than works-oriented) lifestyle. Such value statements may be appropriate in a work intended to guide and inform general readers, but they are usually avoided in a work aimed for scholars. The author's (Protestant?) bias may be detected in such statements as ". . . the church of Rome has, from the beginning, been enthusiastic not only for the kingdom, but also for the power and the glory" (pp. 188-89).

Goulder has done detailed research of the NT texts, and he presents fascinating and well-argued insights into areas of conflict between two early Christian groups. The conflict between Paul and the Jerusalem church is undeniable, given the evidence from Paul's writings and Acts. Whether this conflict represents the whole of Christianity is debatable. Goulder's work does deserve a hearing, however, and it would be better served by being in a more scholarly format than the present book.