1 Introduction

The development of an inner-Jewish community who believed in Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah into the global movement of “Christianity” poses difficult historical questions at many points. Among them, the original acceptance of the first Gentiles as Gentiles into this group is one of the most pressing issues. Within the Protestant tradition, this historical question has, for the most part, been deeply interwoven with the theological debate about justification—and, thus, with the person of Paul.

This relatedness of historical and theological matters suggests that a shift in the perspective on Paul’s thought might also entail a reconsideration of his role in the historical process that led to Christian congregations with Gentile members, especially vis-à-vis other prominent figures within the early Christian movement.

Accordingly, this essay will discuss the question of how recent trends in Pauline studies—the emergence of the so-called “New Perspective on Paul” (in the following: NPP)—have influenced the perception of the two foundational figures of Paul and Peter in relation to the historical question of how it came to be that Gentiles became an important part of the early Christian movement.

2 Peter and Paul in New Testament Scholarship

2.1 F.C. Baur

Even before the NPP the Lutheran faith-works-dichotomy had been challenged as the guiding paradigm within the protestant tradition of Pauline research. For F.C. Baur, Paul’s great achievement was to be understood as offering a new point of departure for Christianity,\(^1\) by overcoming Jewish particularism and

\(^1\) Cf. F.C. Baur, Kirchengeschichte der ersten Jahrhunderte (vol. 1 of Geschichte der christlichen
transforming Christianity into an “allgemeine[s] Heilsprinzip für alle Völker.”

Thus, in his conversion he broke through the barriers of Judaism and dissolved Jewish particularism within the universal idea of Christianity.

It is in this context that the inclusion of Gentiles into the Christian movement is to be understood, i.e., as the result of a religious transformation of the nationalist idea of Judaism through Paul. In the wake of Baur, the “Antioch incident,” which is recounted in Gal 2:11–21, became the prime textual proof for Paul’s isolated stance within the early Christian movement in that regard—and thus also a hermeneutical key for understanding the development of early Christianity in general. It offered a fixed point from which one could interpret the events leading to this clash as well as the trajectories going out from it. Here, the Jewish mission of the church of Jerusalem and Paul’s law-free gospel to the Gentiles collided. In this light, the factions in Corinth (cf. e.g. 1 Cor 1:12) and elsewhere could only be understood as the lasting break between both strands in early Christianity. In this paradigm, it is only natural to read the rest of the Pauline correspondence as evidence for the Völkerapostel becoming increasingly isolated, being rejected in his collection for the church of Jerusalem and dying alone in the end in Rome. Also, looking in the other direction on the timeline, this incident was the defining evidence for demonstrating that the innovative Paul met a Jewish Christianity that had no interest in the inclusion of Gentile Christians.

2.2 The New Perspective on Paul

How did the NPP change this approach to Paul, Peter, and the historical problem of Gentiles as being part of the early Christian movement? First, one should

---


2 Baur, Kirchengeschichte, 45.


4 Of course, Baur also famously emphasized the conflict between the Hellenists and Hebraists in Jerusalem. But the group around Stephen is in the end only regarded as a “Vorläufer” of Paul (Baur, Kirchengeschichte, 42). Thus, it is only in him that the group receives “seinen eigentlichen Herold und seine principielle Begründung” (Baur, Kirchengeschichte, 43).