BOOK REVIEWS


In this latest book, Markus Bockmuehl, Professor of Biblical and Early Christian Studies at the University of Oxford, introduces his readers to a historical and biblical study of the church's memory of the apostle Peter. All NT passages about Peter, along with references to Peter in the literature of the second century, are studied together to explore the portrait of the apostle the early church remembered. *Simon Peter in Scripture and Memory* is an adaptation of an earlier more technical work, *The Remembered Peter in Ancient Reception and Modern Debate* (Mohr Siebeck, 2010).

Since Oscar Cullmann's groundbreaking work in 1952, many scholars have attempted to reconstruct the life, ministry, and witness of the apostle. This book is also set among a number of recent publications on Peter and the renewal of interest in Petrine studies since Pope John Paul II's ecumenical invitation to study the role of the papacy in his 1995 encyclical *Ut unum sint*. In many ways, Bockmuehl's recent work tends “to vindicate Cullmann’s basic approach” (181), but his method offers a fresh perspective on Peter. He attempts to uncover what is remembered about Peter from the late second century back to the writings of the NT. In this methodology, he accepts “that the early church recognized well into the second century a select group of what we might call sub-apostolic bearers of memory, who were widely regarded as—and in some cases perhaps were in fact—living links between the leaders of the apostolic generation and the churches that followed them” (16). Hence, his “aim is to present an accessible test case of the twin principles of attending to the text’s implied readers and early effective history . . . as possible ways to rekindle a common conversation about the object of the NT” (17). One, however, recognizes that second-century images of Peter are often “a confusing mix of tradition, collective memory, and proliferating legend” (37). Frequent, what is history or living memory is intermingled with devout tradition and imagination—“too often we cannot pry them apart, and to abandon one is to lose our grasp of the other” (38). Is it, then, possible to uncover the real Peter? Bockmuehl believes that to a large extent the task is possible. His conclusion of the analyses of the documents he studies provide a valuable and enlightening contribution to Petrine studies.

The book begins with a brief survey of the most significant NT information about Peter. After reviewing all the evidence, Bockmuehl finds that “all in all, then, the NT’s formative picture of Peter is surprisingly vague and incomplete in biographical terms, considering his prominence not only in the original circle of the Twelve, but also for the mission and expansion of the first-century church” (32). Notably, “the NT is markedly silent about what happens to Peter” (32). Hence, he does not gloss over the difficulties found in the NT and does not attempt to harmonize or synthesize all the information in order to compose a clearer portrait of the apostle.
The two major chapters of the book form its central section and attempt to uncover what is remembered about Peter in the East and the West. The chapter on the Eastern Peter considers early documents from Syria and Asia Minor: the writings of Serapion of Antioch, Justin Martyr, Ignatius of Antioch, Pseudo-Clementines, and other small pseudepigrapha and noncanonical documents. In the NT, he considers the Gospels of John and Matthew, as well as 2 Peter and Galatians. From his study, Bockmuehl concludes that overall “Peter is consistently singled out from his fellow apostles as a (if not the) key figure in the early Christian movement” (95).

In spite of this, one abiding puzzle about Peter’s footprint in the East is the fact that so little is said about him. This paucity of information about Peter may be due to the lack of physical and geographical places to point to in the early centuries to give shape to such a memory, and the possibility that little “could have survived Palestinian Christianity’s dramatic disruptions of A.D. 70 and . . . A.D. 135” (96). In the emerging Christian faith of the first two centuries, and in Eastern literature,

Peter as “the rock” here represents not a polemical but a consensual principle, universally accepted as being authoritative yet without any possibility of being authoritarian. As a representative torchbearer of the foundation of apostles and prophets, Peter is indeed the first among equals (97).

The chapter on the Western Peter considers the writings of Dionysius of Corinth, Marcion, Phlegon of Tralles, and Clement of Rome, and, in the NT, Luke and Acts, Mark, and the epistles of 1 Peter, Romans, and 1 Corinthians. In these documents, the evidence about Peter is much more substantial. In the Gospel of Luke, the Petrine memory concentrates on the Passion narrative, while in the book of Acts Peter is immediately placed as the leading apostle. Taking for granted the relatively mainstream position that the Gospel of Mark was written in Rome, Bockmuehl accepts the intent of the gospel narrative “of accentuating the remembered Peter as the guarantor of Mark’s Palestinian story of Jesus for a Roman readership” (132) and “the reading of Mark’s narrative in the Roman churches both reflected and contributed to their memory of Peter” (141).

In these two chapters about Peter in Eastern and Western memory, Bockmuehl tries to show “that the living memory of the first two centuries allows modest access to a period when eyewitnesses of Peter, and those who remembered them, were still alive. There is not enough here to write a history; yet, there is more than just a late fiction invented out of whole cloth after A.D. 150 in order to combat Gnostics” (150). In the end, he concludes that

The apostle’s remembered connection with particular places and people . . . is always tenuous and ranges from the occasionally probable to the frequently implausible, but it weaves a fascinating tissue of reception in which Peter emerges as a person of strong but fascinatingly ambivalent characteristics. It is a difficult but rewarding task to explore the relationship between that reception and its historical development (150).

Bockmuehl also offers two brief chapters as case studies into the memory of Peter. The first surveys the textual, archaeological, and
iconographic evidence regarding how Peter became a disciple and concludes that “the crucifixion-resurrection sequence . . . marks the moment of Peter’s conversion” (163). The second chapter examines the evidence for Peter’s birthplace in Bethsaida and suggests that Peter’s upbringing in a culturally diverse context, where his Judaism in marginal circumstances “would have left him culturally and perhaps linguistically better equipped than James to envisage the gospel’s outreach from Jerusalem to Antioch and Rome” (176).

Bockmuehl concludes that across the spectrum of these texts from different theological, historical, and geographical locations, a complex but not necessarily contradictory portrait of Peter emerges. Peter is the rock, an eyewitness to the passion and resurrection of Jesus, and he is a witness, healer, miracle worker, and martyr. Beginning as a fisherman from Capernaum, the apostle became a centrist, bridge-building, and unifying figure in the early church, often pictured with Paul as the twin pillars of the Roman church. A sincere, if flawed, disciple of Jesus (180).

This book is a commendable contribution to the biblical and historical study of Petrine memory. Bockmuehl, at times, appears to be tentative in his conclusions, but that is to his credit given the variety of documents and the lack of information he works with. However, he is able to analyze carefully various strands of this memory and, in doing this, brings out insights that make the book a valuable tool in current ecumenical studies.

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Almost twenty years ago The Text of the New Testament in Contemporary Research (TNTCR) was published for the purpose of providing scholars and students alike with an easily accessible and an up-to-date advanced source for every major aspect of NT textual criticism. For more than a decade, the TNTCR served its purpose well (as this reviewer’s well-worn copy testifies). Over the last few years, however, the volume’s value has diminished considerably as more recent advances in textual criticism rendered parts of the original work virtually obsolete. In an attempt to rectify this problem, Ehrman and Holmes, the original editors, have thoroughly revised and expanded the volume with the stated goal of making it once again the standard reference work on NT textual criticism “for a generation to come.”

For those acquainted with the original volume, a quick glance at the new edition makes it obvious that the book has received far more than just a superficial refreshing. The new volume, now in hardcover, is more than twice the size of the original work—a total of 884 pages. Beyond its increased size, the other most notable aspect is its list price, which has more than quadrupled from $49.99 to $314.00. While the price of the volume will certainly limit