

RBL 02/2007



Hengel, Martin

Der unterschätzte Petrus: Zwei Studien

Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006. Pp. x + 261. Paper.
€24.00. ISBN 3161488954.

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Martin Hengel, the eighty-year-old emeritus professor of Tübingen University, has produced a work consisting of two separate essays joined by a common theme: Peter and Paul are co-responsible for Christianity, although Peter has been underestimated. The first and longer of the two, "Peter the Rock, Paul, and the Gospel Tradition," is also the newer (2005). In 166 pages Hengel starts with Matt 16:17–19 and argues that the nickname Cephas goes back to Jesus, that the wordplay Peter–rock arose immediately after Easter, and that the saying itself looks back over the whole career of Peter. Hengel views Peter's career as starting in Jerusalem, which he left in 43 C.E., including the Apostolic Council and a later conflict with Paul in Antioch, the results of which are noted in many Pauline letters. Peter himself became more and more a missionary to the Gentiles as well as to the Jews. Indeed, he is the guarantor behind the Gospel of his student Mark. Although not as educated as Paul, Peter was a capable theological thinker, preacher, and organizer. The fact is that it is both Paul with his letters and Peter with his gospel who are together responsible for the apostolic witness. This thesis is, of course, argued with an energy and depth that one would expect from Professor Hengel. One's evaluation of it will be determined by how one evaluates the documents he uses

(especially Acts) and the degree to which one accepts his historical reconstruction (e.g., the relationship of Acts 15 to Gal 2).

The second essay, "Peter's Family and the Other Apostolic Families" (1997), is fifty-three pages long and perhaps because of that is the more interesting of the two to this reviewer. The thesis of the essay is that both Mark's Gospel and Paul's letters witness to the fact that Peter and at least some of the other apostles were married. Perhaps even the sending in pairs in the Gospel may indicate couples being sent. Interestingly enough, Luke, student of the celibate Paul, drops the reference to Peter's marriage. Besides Peter, the apostle Philip and the apostolic pair Aquila and Priscilla were married, as were others. In fact, there is documentary evidence that in one case the office of bishop was passed down seven generations father to son. Later, of course, Clement of Alexandria introduced the idea of spiritual marriage, and the portrayals of Peter and Philip were changed to fit the new ideal. But the evidence is that in the earliest period marriage was not generally abandoned by the followers of Jesus and in fact was part of the context of their ongoing ministry.

Obviously one's evaluation of this thesis (as that of the previous essay) is dependent upon one's acceptance of (1) Hengel's interpretation of the various passages and (2) Hengel's acceptance of and/or evaluation of the second- and third-century materials that he cites. There is not space to discuss that in detail in a review other than to note that Hengel would be in the mainstream of German scholarship. On the other hand, even if one may disagree with Hengel, one only does so cautiously. The essays make clear that he is absolutely steeped in the literature that he is citing in a way that his footnotes (which are copious enough) can only partially indicate. This reviewer finds Hengel's portrayal of Peter not just often persuasive but also enjoyable reading. It is, in fact, an education in itself to watch a master at work.