

Finn Damgaard, *Rewriting Peter as an Intertextual Character in the Canonical Gospels* (Copenhagen International Seminar; New York – London: Routledge 2016). Pp. x, 153. € 120. ISBN 978-1-138-92202-0 (hardback).

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*Rewriting Peter* is the second book after *Recasting Moses* (2013)<sup>1</sup> that was published by Finn Damgaard. It's author was a postdoctoral scholar at the Biblical Studies Section at the University of Copenhagen, where he was engaged in the project: *Gospels as Rewritten Bible*. The reviewed book is a result of that appointment. Some parts of this study were previously published in the form of papers, which is clearly indicated in the text (e.g. p. x, 77). *Rewriting Peter* fits into the wider perspective of a series that is labeled as Copenhagen International Seminar. Works published under that label all seemed to be especially focused on historical, cultural, and anthropological contexts of the Bible, but also the question of historicity of the biblical texts, sometimes also having a biblical narrative as a point of interest.

*Rewriting Peter* seems to somehow connect all that perspectives by working with a hypothesis concerning the history of the texts and its redaction, narratives itself, but also by employing intertextual tools for a comparison of the ways in which the character of Peter is portrayed in every Gospel to reach for better understanding of the author's intents. In the short book presentation, it is claimed to be the first critical study of the canonical gospels which is "based on Markan priority, Luke's use of Mark and Matthew, and John's use of all three synoptic Gospels." This way, Damgaard proposes a new critical portrayal of Peter and a new theory of source and redaction in the gospels (p. i). Those points are surely showing a strong claim on the originality of the published study.

In working with a biblical character that is pictured in more than one text, one can have different goals. Either one can, for example seek a historical person behind that picture, or can look for the theological priorities hidden behind the

<sup>1</sup> F. Damgaard, *Recasting Moses The Memory of Moses in Biographical and Autobiographical Narratives in Ancient Judaism and 4th-Century Christianity* (Early Christianity in the Context of Antiquity 13; Frankfurt: Lang 2013).

different pictures or the author's attitude toward that character, or even – what actually Damgaards is setting as his goal – discover the attitude of the author of one particular picture toward authors of the other ones and their texts.

It is worth making some comments on the editorial side of the book before turning to its scientific value. After customary “Acknowledgements” and “Introduction,” the author presents four chapters followed by a “Conclusion,” “Appendix,” “Bibliography” and “Index.” Notes are being presented at the end of every chapter. Even seeing that it is correct, it'd be much more convenient to have them at the bottom of the page due to their commentary character. Every part of the book is divided into clearly separated sections and subsections having their own title. Titles are short and informative, properly indicating the content of the corresponding entitled part of text. Sometimes they have almost technical quality, like – “Survey of Scholarship,” sometimes more of a topical, or one can even say, a poetic taste, like – “The Power of Differences” (both taken from the “Introduction”). Subsection and section titles differ only by the font size and italics. It seems that putting some numbers would help to keep track and could make a structure even more clear, especially seeing that no section or subsection is shown in the “Content” presentation. Again, a widely accepted standard, but one worth discussing. For many readers interested in only part of the work, putting at least sections or even subsections on the content page could help navigate the book much better.

All that said, it is now possible to present the content itself. In the “Introduction,” after pointing out that the main point of interest, and also a base for this study, are not similarities in the portrayal of Peter, but differences (“The Power of Differences”), the author makes a “Survey of Scholarship.” He mentions many classical authors (like Ferdinand C. Baur, Rudolf Bultmann or Oscar Cullman) but also shows the good knowledge of recent literature of the subject. The survey is very coherent. The author is able to show only the questions and ideas that are interesting to him from the point of his research. While presenting particular views and ideas he makes critical comments. For one, it gives the presentation more personal character and for another, makes the opinions of the author clear. Worth mentioning is his polemic with an important study of Peter by Richard Cassidy. It concentrates on pictures of Peter in the canonical gospels. Damgaard disagrees with the view woven into a basic assumption of Cassidy's work, namely, that the gospels were written in isolation. Cassidy's study is a narrative critical work but also attempts at reception criticism. Damgaard criticize him for not being accordingly aware of the historical issues regarding sequence of the New Testament writings and its consequences on the study. In the course of the criticism, Damgaard makes an interesting remark, one worth quoting:

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If we first acknowledge that the gospels were not written in splendid isolation, it lays near at hand to reconsider if any of the gospels should be read as a response to a previous gospel narrative and if some of the gospel authors presuppose that the intended readers (whether in Philippi [it was a point of interest of Cassidy – my addition. S.S.] or another place) actually knew the other gospel narratives (p. 8).

This phrase is worth remembering, because in reading Damgaard's book, the reader should consider the question whether it's author did a better job.

A few lines later, the author adds: "In contrast to Cassidy's study, I do not think that a study of Peter in the gospels can be considered complete without a thorough study of the relationship between the gospels' portrayal of Peter" (p. 8).

His choice of the tools for the research on the character of Peter in the canonical gospels is turning to an intertextual approach to the gospels in the sense that it "traces chains of influence between the gospels" (p. 8).

In his methodology he adopts the criteria developed by Richard B. Hays and Manfred Pfister that can indicate the influence of one text on another. He uses them however in specific ways. His approach can be shown by the quote: "I will not necessarily use Hays and Pfister's criteria explicitly to substantiate the proposed intertextual activity, but the criteria implicitly undergird my treatment of the pre-texts and the judgements concerning intertextual intensity" (p. 9).

One can wonder if such an approach to this criteria makes a good and useful tool, however, it needs to be said that often in the main chapters when working with text, he selectively revokes one or more criteria that he finds appropriate to support his statements.

In the main part of the work, Damgaard, doing a lot of comparative work and closely working with gospel narratives, reaches conclusions regarding the connections between the hypothetical (assumed) history of the text, and the attitude of its author toward Peter being the reflection of that attitude.

In chapter 1 he presents how Mark supposedly created the picture of Peter on the base of his portrayal in Pauline letters and also on the basis of Paul's biography of reversal. The link between Mark and Peter in his eyes is not the result of their close acquaintance and cooperation, but the result of the intelligent literary ploy to use Peter's authority as a means to add a certain authoritative weight to his narrative. In the second chapter, Damgaard tries to show how Matthew – using irony to present Peter as a flawed character – does that to undermine the authority of the text of his predecessor in comparison to his own, which is more based on the authority of all 12 disciples. In the third chapter he shows how Luke tries to rehabilitate Peter, on one hand, and to parallel his portrayal with that of Paul, on the other, to base his work on those two authorities of the early church. In the fourth chapter, Damgaard shows how John uses synoptic sources in working with Peter and showing him as a paradigmatic character in terms of his martyr death,

but ultimately uses a new figure – Beloved Disciple – that he adds to synoptic accounts of Peter’s encounters with Jesus, only to make him a better witness and a better authority behind his text.

In the conclusion, the author summarizes his work and also points out some issues that are showing his awareness of highly hypothetical value of his work. He states: “I am, of course, aware that the thesis I have presented here can hardly be more than a conjecture. It is a speculative exercise that seeks to explain the gospel authors’ intentions and motivations...” (p. 124)

Earlier, in the “Introduction,” where he presents his approach to the text – his assumed Markan priority, knowledge of Mark’s Gospel by Mathew, Luke’s knowledge of his predecessors’ texts and all of those texts known by Forth Gospel’s author (thus omitting any other sources like Q completely) – Damgaard states: “Even if such an approach for some will only have the character of a thought experiment, it will hopefully make a difference to how we see the gospel authors’ creative narrative theologizing and improve our understanding of the gospel’s portrayals of Peter” (p. 3).

Seeing that working on discovering the author’s intentions for changing the sources during work with them is a speculative task he also states:

It is admittedly a highly speculative exercise and a complicated experiment to seek to explain intentions and motivations for changes, innovations, omissions and rewritings, and we may run the risk that these intentions and motivations cannot be definitely established. It certainly involves some educated guesswork (p. 2).

Experimentation sometimes may be a very useful tool. However, if we base our experiment on uncertain assumptions, it can spoil the results depending on what is the goal of the whole research. In this case, what we are dealing with here, is not simply falsifying or confirming some thesis through an experiment like in science, but developing the consequences of some hypothesis. If one finds the quest for truth as a guiding goal in all research, the reader can ask himself, what kind of truth can be verified by Damgaard's experiment? Does it bring us closer to the knowledge of the texts itself? Do we get to better know the role of Peter in the narrative? What might be the highly hypothetical intentions of authors? Treating all his work as merely some experiment based on uncertain assumptions should raise the question: how to treat all the presented results and findings in the terms of getting closer to the truth? This way also brings to the discussion table a very general topic of the role and sense of biblical research, and usefulness of some of its procedures in the quest for the truth that obviously can’t be fully discussed here. On the other hand, it needs to be clear that at some point most of the scholars working with gospels are forced to work with some assumptions. It would be

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improper to discredit a work merely due to the choice of hypothesis that are less popular at the moment or because of choosing very difficult or challenging task.

Of course there will be readers who would agree with the author's assumptions and will fully embrace the results. There will also be others who would not care much for the quality of the assumptions. (They will treat reading this book as an intellectual adventure being interested in the whole endeavor and its results.) For some people who would not agree with Damgaard's assumptions, results in general would be easily fully discarded on the basis of that wrong input. Yet others – careful readers with analytical mindsets – would try to follow the author's argumentation, dissecting it and carefully weighing every argument to find some statements that are more, and others that are less, dependent on the assumptions they do not agree with. Mainly for those readers, the lecture of the book can be a very rewarding one. In my opinion, the value of this book does not lay in the questionable (in terms of their certainty) statements as being the result of the experiment (even author the sees that result's hypothetical value) that should be weighed against the groundworking assumptions or the views or opinions of the reader. One might wonder, for example, if really superseding or outdoing previous author's texts was the main goal that writers wanted to achieve, as Damgaard many times concludes (e.g. pp. 53, 84, 117). The value of this book lies elsewhere.

If someone missed that part of the quote, it should be reminded here which hopes for the book author had in mind publishing it: "it will hopefully make a difference to how we see the gospel authors' creative narrative theologizing and improve our understanding of the gospel's portrayals of Peter."

The book presents itself to the reader as quite an original one. And not only because of how the author treats biblical sources or gospel writers. For everyone that tried to write comparative work on some biblical character as presented in different texts, the enormous methodological challenges such a task incurs are quite obvious. There are indeed very few comparative works on Peter in the New Testament, and most (if not all) are mentioned in that work. Searching for an approach on how to work with so many different texts that present one character, varying in many ways, depending on the questions that we ask, demands finding tools that would bring us the answer. In doing so, Damgaard turns to intertextuality. Interdependence among texts is of course the focus of this method. But in doing so, he also reads the narrative very carefully. Many of his original remarks, for example concerning John's narrative and role of Peter in that narration, can't be easily discarded, especially when we see that in the case of the Fourth Gospel, idea that it's author knew other gospel accounts (at least Luke's) is assumed by many other authors. Original as they sometimes are, they make a reader come back to the text and ask it new questions. It is what proper research always ought to do. So between very hypothetical assumptions or statements, for example,

about the image of Peter in the Gospel of Mark having Pauline letters as its source, or the statements about gospel authors' intent, the reader will find in this book a rich comparative material concerning the similarities and differences between the picture of Peter in different texts, including many very bright and interesting scholar intuitions worth exploring. It also makes the reader more sensitive toward the author's attitude and goals when picturing a portrayal of the character in the text, even if someone would not agree with the work's conclusions.

For Damgaard, the role that Peter may play in the narrative is connected with the legitimization of the text itself. It becomes one of the main questions that Damgaard deals with – what elements of the portrayal of Peter have what influence on his ability to be a legitimizing figure for the text. That is a perspective worth noting for all scholars that work with the portrayal of Peter that he was trying to explore in his comparative work.

Comparing pictures of Peter in canonical gospels this way may always be seen as a step toward further developing intertextual works with that character. For example, would it be worth checking how the same or similar approach might work with other assumptions regarding the sources? Or what are other, besides ones already known, consequences of the fact that Peter was an authoritative figure in the early church, for not only the reader of the gospel, but also for the writer in the process of writing? Giving also the voice to some less popular thesis and statements and sometimes trying to weigh some of them against more popular ones gives the reader more objective perspective on the *status quaestionis* of that matter.

For all the reasons that book can be treated as an interesting intellectual and scholarly enterprise to a general audience, yet can easily gain a 'must have' status and point of reference for all scholars trying to work with the portrayal of Peter in the canonical gospels (being one of a very few), especially the Fourth One, even if some scholars might criticize it for the way it treats the Gospel sources or even the conclusions itself.