

"What image of Peter is presented by Paul's (authentic) letters and by the Gospel of John (including Chapter 21)?"

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It is astonishing that for Simon Peter, a man so central to the very beginning of Christianity and the "Rock" upon which the Church is built, there exists so little reliable information. He is well represented in pseudonymous and legendary material both canonical and apocryphal, but, unlike Paul, we have not been left any genuine letters or books which could give us his own story. The references to Peter in John's Gospel and in Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians and Galatians, however, allow an interesting glimpse at the personality of Peter, as they emanate from outside of his immediate following yet are not overtly hostile to the man. It is in these recollections of one, and likely two of Peter's apostolic colleagues, Paul and the Beloved Disciple, that our best chance of an honest view of Peter exists.

Neither of these sources is primarily concerned with enlightening the reader about Peter, understandably their primary focus is Christ. The incidental nature of the accounts, especially that of Paul, prevent certainty that a full picture of their view of Peter is still available to us.

It is certain however that these documents require different handling. Paul mentions Peter in two of his letters, First Corinthians and Galatians. These are undeniably authentic letters from the sixth decade of the first century which record somewhat incidentally Paul's dealings with Peter within a few years of their occurrence. Paul's first hand accounts must be read with the knowledge that his closeness to the topic can skew his judgment, but having taken this into account we still have the earliest written records of Peter's existence with the further happy bonus of Paul's transmission of early Church formulae which reflect on Peter.

John's Gospel is the record of the community which  
revers<sup>e</sup> the tradition of the Beloved Disciple. This is  
at least several decades further removed from the events  
it discusses and, while Paul is in the main recounting  
post-easter information, these considerations have to be  
inferred in the Gospel records from Peter's behaviour in  
largely pre-easter events. While there is a sense in  
which the Beloved Disciple represents the Johannine  
Circle and Peter the tradition of the Twelve, in which  
the two persons become paradigmatic for the respective  
groups of believers, this does not alter the fact that  
Peter existed. It is also extremely unlikely that the  
Johannine circle was founded by anyone other than a  
remarkable real person, the Beloved Disciple.(1)  
Looking for clues to the communities' view of the  
personality of characters in the Gospel is made more  
valid by the parallels of Peters actions found in the  
Synoptics, witness the Synoptics swordplay in the garden  
attributed to Peter in John.

The personality behind each<sup>of</sup> the sources,  
fragmentary as the sources are, can be seen to give  
their views upon such key issues as Peter's primacy, his  
commission, and their dealings and conflicts with the  
man.

All Biblical quotations come from the Jerusalem  
Bible.

There is a tradition in the Synoptics, in Acts and in the early Church Fathers of the primacy of Peter. He was the first called, the first to see the risen Christ and the leader of the early Church. In their pericopes of the call of the first four disciples all the Synoptics name Simon first.(Matt.4:18,Mark1:16,Luke5:3) Luke presents the formulaic,"the Lord has risen and appeared to Simon,"(24:35) in the story of the road to Emmaus. The original ending to Mark may well have preserved this story of Christ's appearance to Peter(2), as hinted at in 16:7, contrasting with the preserved ending which gives the tradition of the appearance to the Magdalen. Matthew preserves an appearance to the women(28:9), but of all the Gospels is the most emphatic about Peter's primacy, being the source of the connection between his naming as "Rock" and being the basis of the Church.(16:18) Luke has Peter as undisputed leader of the young Church in Acts. Outside this tradition in their own ways Paul and the author of

John's Gospel confirm Peter's importance, but place him in perspective as one authority in the Church rather than the sole authority.

Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians has amongst his call for unity in the Church evidence of a faction in Corinth owing allegiance to Peter. It is disputed whether Peter ever personally went to Corinth as Paul and Apollos had<sup>?</sup>(3), but it seems the tradition of his primacy as found in Matthew has reached there. Paul here gives us the earliest record of Peter's existence, confirming him as an apostle of Christ, taking his place with Apollos and himself. Also confirmed is Peter's fame amongst Christians which has travelled through the Greek-speaking world carried either personally or by missionaries sympathetic to him. This letter's formulaic "Gospel" in Chapter 15 gives the earliest testimony to Peter receiving the first appearance of the risen Christ:

Christ died for our sins, in accordance with the scriptures; that he was buried; and that he was

raised to life on the third day, in accordance with the scriptures; that he appeared <sup>(to)</sup> first to Cephas and secondly to the twelve. (1Cor15:3-5)

This tradition is echoed in Luke's treatment of the subject, <sup>Luke however</sup> ~~but he~~ does not follow Matthew's <sup>course of</sup> ~~in~~ expanding Peter's profession of faith that Jesus is the Christ into Peter as the basis of the Church. (Luke 9:20)

Likewise Paul, to whom independence from Jerusalem is crucial, can record Peter as the first to witness Jesus after the resurrection without this making Peter the ultimate authority. In his description of his dealings with the Jerusalem Church, Paul confirms Peter as a pillar of the Church, but this is along with James and John (Gal 2:9). Any idea that Peter is the leader of the whole Christian movement is absent; rather, Paul describes a "partnership" (Gal 2:9) of workers within the unity of Christ.

John's Gospel also witnesses to Peter's importance in the Church. A parallel of sorts is given of Peter's central confession of faith from the Synoptics adding the insight that Jesus has; "the message of eternal



life."(6:68) Here Peter speaks for the "Twelve" and is clearly established as their representative. This is not as great an honour as in the Synoptics with this Gospels emphasis on the actions of followers from outside the circle of the "Twelve". The renown of Peter is however further acknowledged by the author of the Gospel who speaks of Andrew, even after he has already been introduced, as ~~★~~ "Simon Peter's brother."(6:9)

Peter is not accorded the honour of primacy amongst all the followers of Christ, as opposed to the "Twelve." In this Gospel the ideal apostle is the Beloved Disciple. It is likely that he can be identified with the anonymous disciple who, along with Andrew, is given the honour of being the first disciple to be called by Christ in opposition to the tradition of Peter being the first called.(4) The Beloved Disciple is presented as being involved in a sort of apostolic "one-upmanship"(5) with Peter throughout the latter part of the Gospel in which Peter rarely emerges on level terms. In addition

this Gospel transmits the tradition of Mary Magdalene  
being the first to whom the risen Christ appears. So

7 <sup>while</sup> Peter, ~~while~~ in this tradition remains as leader of the  
"Twelve", here, as with Paul <sup>ne</sup> has no claim to primacy over  
the whole of Christendom.

I had been commissioned to preach the Good News to the uncircumcised just as Peter had been commissioned to preach it to the circumcised (Gal 2:7)

Paul states what he understands Peter's role to be, that is, the same as his own. For Paul, he and Peter are apostles, "stewards entrusted with the mysteries of God." (1Cor 3:22) Peter is ranked with Apollos and Paul as Christ's servants and he notes that it is expected, "that each one should be worthy of his trust." (4:2) While this is not a definite seal of approval on the conduct of Peter, Paul at least does not say he is unworthy. I see no significance in Paul's omission of Peter as an example in 4:6, as he later uses Peter as one of his examples of an apostle whose conduct illustrates the rights of an apostle, in Peter's case the right to have a wife. (9:5) Paul's stand in not having a wife is not criticism of Peter as the context is one in which Paul is listing the rights of an apostle which he refuses for his own reasons. In addition, for Paul, having seen the risen Christ was an important part

of apostleship and the tradition he possesses of Peter as the first to have seen the risen Lord reinforces his commission as an apostle.(6)

For the author of John's Gospel Peter isn't always seen in a positive light, but he is clear that he sees Peter's pastoral role as legitimate. Throughout the work he appears associated with the motifs of this role. Cullman notes, "harvesting(4:3), shepherding(10:1-16,21:15-19), bearing fruit(15:1-8), and fishing(21:3-14)."(7) All this climaxes with Christ's threefold questioning of Peter in Chapter 21 to affirm Peter's love for Jesus and to give him the commission to, "feed my sheep."(21:17) The other commission given to Peter here is to follow Christ in martyrdom otherwise only attested to by later tradition.(21:18-19)

*past tense!*

*concerning*

Paul testifies in Galatians to the occasions when he <sup>has</sup> ~~had~~ direct dealings with Peter, and with a notable exception Paul sees no reason to disagree with Peter, in particular with his portrayal of the Good News. In fact Paul's <sup>report of his</sup> sojourn with Peter early in his career (2:18), while in context ~~wants~~ <sup>Paul wants Paul is trying to show</sup> to show how few of the Jerusalem disciples influenced <sup>Paul</sup> ~~Paul~~ and help establish his independence, reveals <sup>that</sup> Peter may well have been a crucial influence on Paul's thinking. Apart from the chance to obtain first hand confirmation of the stories of Jesus before his death which he had doubtless heard from the brethren in Damascus, Paul may well have picked up on theological concepts which originated with Peter.

Cullman suggests that Peter conceived the idea of an atoning death, that: "the great idea which Paul later worked out in systematic form very probably occurred first to the fisherman Peter." (8) It would not therefore be a surprise that even fourteen years later Paul is able to say that the leaders of the Jerusalem

Church, including Peter; "had nothing to add to the Good News as I preach it."(2:6) This allows the participants to shake hands on a deal apportioning spheres of influence for mission work.

According to the testimony of John's Gospel, the Beloved Disciple, like Paul, knew Peter personally. In the account of the last supper Peter is confident enough of the disciple's closeness to Christ to ask him to find out who will betray Jesus.(13:25) Peter also accompanies the disciple after the arrest(18:15) and again to the empty tomb.(20:2) Although it is clear Peter is not held in the <sup>same</sup> regard as the Beloved Disciple, that he is repeatedly seen in association with Peter <sup>at all</sup>, speaks volumes for <sup>Peter's</sup> ~~his~~ acceptability to the ~~group that~~ Peter ~~basically~~ had. *Johanne Comenius*

Paul, who stresses unity in the Church, details one incident where he found himself in opposition to Peter <sup>placing</sup> and tension is ~~placed~~ on this unity. Paul is not telling the Galatians this to warn them that Peter is a thoroughly disreputable man, otherwise his preamble outlining amongst other things his cordial relations with and probable help received from Peter would not be needed. Rather, Paul tells the Galatians that he and Peter are in agreement over the true meaning of the Good News, but in one incident which illustrates his point to the Galatians perfectly, Peter was in error. Paul's letter is in opposition to; "Jewish Christian Judaizers from Jerusalem who were forcing the Galatians to be circumcised and to keep the law."(9) In Peter's actions at Antioch, Paul finds the hypocrisy which makes his point:

In spite of being a Jew, you live like the pagans and not like the Jews, so you have no right to make the pagans copy Jewish ways.(Gal 2:14)



This naturally allows Paul to introduce his discourse on justification by faith which is his understanding of the Gospel. Paul's accusation that Peter withdrew from table fellowship for fear of "the group that insisted on circumcision,"(2:12) is an easy statement for one such as Paul, who has the smug assurance of those of his righteous ilk, to make. It is likely that these men who were friends of James required of Peter a certain diplomacy and accession to political expediency for an apostle who was dependant on the Jewish Church.(10) Paul can use the incident against the Judaizers and ~~also~~ <sup>also</sup> show how their actions cause dissent and disunity in the Church, but what for Paul is hypocrisy may be more generously interpreted as merely human weakness, perhaps insensitivity, or more likely good politics.

John's Gospel's presentation of Peter allows no such direct view of conflict of the author with Peter, but we do get to see through the portrayal of Peter's actions

in the Gospel a glimpse at a very human apostle. He is by turns impulsive, somewhat unreliable and often painfully slow to understand his master. Although as noted the Beloved Disciple as an ideal disciple can represent the Johannine community and Peter the circle of his tradition, the natural humanity of the way Peter acts in this Gospel suggests a basis in fact. This could be due to their being based on traditions of Peter's pre-<sup>E</sup>easter activities or the implantation of his post-<sup>E</sup>easter activities back into stories of the time of Jesus' ministry. Either way a reasonably consistent personality shows through his actions, particularly through his unfavourable comparison with the Beloved Disciple.

The enthusiasm of Peter is clear from the Johannine accounts, but this is accompanied by a rashness and insensitivity such that it has been bluntly put that "Peter does not cut a good figure in the Gospel of John."(11) Peter when confronted with the shocking

humility of Christ in the foot washing episode, at first refuses, and when this is not acceptable wants to be washed more than his colleagues. (13:6-11) It is Peter who resorts to violence in Jesus' name (18:10), and Peter who boldly ventures into the empty tomb first. (20:2-6) Peter makes rash statements concerning his commitment to Christ which are exposed as hollow in his threefold denial of Christ. (13:36; 18:16-27)

Peter's continual misunderstanding of Jesus' message contrasts with the Beloved Disciple who seems to have a deeper knowledge of Christ. It is particularly significant that while Peter is impulsive enough to enter the empty tomb ahead of the Beloved Disciple, it is not of Peter that it is said, "he saw and he believed," (20:8) It seems the Beloved Disciple then enlightened Peter because immediately following this they both understand; "that he must rise from the dead." (20:9) There is a humanity in this personality which would not be out of place in a fisherman from

Galilee who was a bit out of his depth. While for Luke, Peter's learning and assurance causes astonishment (Acts 4:13), it makes far greater sense if the account in John's Gospel is true.

There is a suggestion of some conflict in the way Peter asks the risen Christ, "what about him, Lord?" (21:21) concerning the Beloved Disciple. Having just been humbled by his love for Jesus being questioned three times, Peter wants to know what to make of the Beloved Disciple. The mysterious answer is further humiliation for Peter as it not very enlightening. As it is written from the perspective of the tradition of the Johannine community, this reply indicates a desire to establish that their community need not justify itself to that of Peter. It is possible that an overenthusiastic and tactless Peter behaved in the same way before and after Jesus' death, and such leadership of the Petrine community led to the defensiveness found

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in this account, the enigmatic reply to Peter suggesting  
he has been gently put in his place.

Because Paul and the Beloved Disciple come from outside the direct influence of Peter's community they are in a position to provide sources avoiding excessive praise of Peter as found in Matthew and Acts, for example, and yet as they have a common bond in Christ they accept Peter as one of the major figures of the early Church. For Paul, Peter is his apostolic counterpart to the circumcised, who while illustrating one of the obstacles to unity when he withdrew from table fellowship in Antioch, is a respected apostle in the united mission of the Good News. While the author of Acts may smooth over any cracks in the unity of the early Church, the impression of little difference in theology between Paul and Peter is probably accurate. For those of the Johannine tradition, Peter is again given a respectable commission as leader of his flock, but there is an understandable emphasis that Peter's tradition is only one kind of relationship with Jesus, and, while different, that of the Beloved Disciple is no

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less valid. Both sources provide a believable view of  
Peter as a vigorous, fallible and, above all, <sup>^</sup>human  
apostle.

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