# *The Ancient Martyrdom Accounts of Peter and Paul* by David L. Eastman (review)


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David L. Eastman
*The Ancient Martyrdom Accounts of Peter and Paul*
Writings from the Greco-Roman World Series 39
Atlanta: SBL Press, 2015
Pp. xxv + 469. $59.95.

David Eastman has performed a valuable service for early church historians, students of hagiography, critics of early Christian literature, and those who labor in the gnarled thickets of Christian apocrypha. He presents four accounts of Peter's martyrdom, five of Paul's, and five joint martyrdom narratives, each with the best available critical Greek, Latin, or Syriac text (without apparatus), serviceable English translations *en face*, introductions, and helpful notes. "Serviceable" means quite readable yet still a useful crib. Most of the translations are the first English version based upon a sound critical text. In addition are about twenty-five relevant patristic citations.

Eastman has the knack of writing concise and lucid introductions that identify the leading issues. His general introduction elucidates three important functions of Christian apocrypha: identity formation, worship, and ecclesiastical politics (xviii–xxii). The first is excellently illustrated by showing how the *Acts of the Scillitan Martyrs* is shaped by the *Acts of Paul* (xviii–ix). The primary liturgical fact is the use of apostolic acts on their feast days. From these texts the manner and location of martyrdom was derived, as well as re-editing to bring the stories into conformity with current beliefs. Just as today any U.S. city claiming prominence must have a top-shelf sports franchise, so an apostolic founder was a *sine qua non* for those desiring metropolitan status. (This is quite apparent is some of the "minor acts," such as those of Barnabas and Titus.) Rome, to mix the metaphor, drew the two top aces, and sought to play them from 1 *Clement* 5 (c. 100+) onward, although without great success before the mid-fifth century.

Eastman illustrates the rise of the governing theme, *concordia apostolorum* (apostolic unanimity), depicted in embraces, perpetuated post-mortem by trees growing over their respective tombs that exchanged an annual hug during the peace at the Easter vigil (e.g., the "History of the Holy Apostle My Lord Paul" 14, 198–200). Concordia was a political theme, represented in the demand for unity among the social orders and coinage proclaiming *concordia augustorum* and *concordia militum*, often symbolized by clasped hands. The Christian object was not only to insist that the apostles agreed, but also that the faithful should agree with them.

'Twas not always thus. Peter and Paul clasped hands (Gal 2.9), followed in due course by a fierce fight (Gal 2.11–14). In Acts, Peter vanishes after chap. 12, leaving the stage to Paul, except for a Paul-endorsing cameo in 15. The *Acts of Paul* knows of no other apostle. Likewise, Peter is the sole object of Neronic machinations in his Acts. These were later revised (Vercelli Acts) to have Peter replace Paul in Rome, after which he remains in sole possession. In the fullness of time *competitio apostolorum* became *Concordia*. Eastman fills in the dots of this intriguing development.

One of its components was a tendency for the apostles to acquire each other's

actions and attributes, a theological result achieved by literary means. Unsophisticated media have long been imitative. If the public likes shipwrecks, crush a hull and let the critics grumble. This selection of texts traces the evolution of the diverse, pre-orthodox apocryphal acts into the more uniform and noncontroversial realm of hagiography. The process homogenized not only theology but ground a variety of genres into flour for a single loaf. The Petrine texts, for example, happily incorporate material from the NT, the *Acts of Peter*, and the Clementines. One result could be the biggest book about Peter ever. Along with conglomeration and expansion went abbreviation, condensed books for those with limited leisure. These antithetic tendencies constitute a major challenge for the study of ancient literature, as critics strive to determine whether variant editions represent expansions or abbreviations.

Eastman's subject leads him to cut to the chase, i.e., when the apostle reaches Rome. This is a book of last chapters, a practice firmly hallowed by ancient precedent. A question we tend not to ask is why. Reasons abound, but one desirable response to this well-edited collection would be to encourage readers to set aside the good old explanations and investigate afresh the merits of Christian preference for the scenes in which the good guy dies.

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Maia Kotrosits
*Rethinking Early Christian Identity: Affect, Violence, and Belonging*
Minneapolis: Fortress, 2015
Pp. xii + 265. $39.00.

In *Rethinking Early Christian Identity: Affect, Violence, and Belonging*, Maia Kotrosits challenges readers to rethink a presupposition so fundamental it is rarely even articulated, arguing that an array of writings from the first and second centuries that are typically understood to be predicated on or constitutive of Christian identity are not, in any important sense, invested in Christian self-understanding, individual or collective. Rather, she contends, the so-called Christian texts on which she focuses are haunted by diasporic trauma: "If a text shows interest in the temple, priesthood, sabbath, Israelite prophetic history, Judea, Genesis stories, or any number of other elements of Israelite tradition . . . , that to me suggests a participation in Israelite diasporic culture" (14). Kotrosits's argument is deliberately affective, steeped in the affects haunting the texts she discusses, attentive to ways that affects of contemporary readers inform the readings they produce, theoretically reliant (not surprisingly) on the growing body of affect-oriented criticism.

Addressing the affective stakes of Christian historiography, in Chapter One Kotrosits situates herself among other recent scholars who have engaged the question of identity in the first and second centuries, arguing that there "are many