In the past few decades New Testament studies have had little to say about Peter except as a walk-on part in studies of either Jesus or Paul. Yet Peter plays an important part both in the traditions about Jesus and Paul and in the writings of Paul himself. Peter also left a highly significant ‘footprint’ in the Church’s memory, as in second-century traditions about the origins of the Gospel according to Mark and in traditions about his martyrdom and place of burial in Rome.

This ‘remembered Peter’ is the focus of the studies that Markus Bockmuehl has brought together in this volume. Two of them in fact relate to the Peter who lies behind the memories, one on the various names given to Peter, and one on the location and archaeology Peter’s home town of Bethsaida. Their effect is to illuminate the background from which Peter came, that of a Jewish minority in a predominantly Gentile milieu. It is thus credible that Peter grew up fluently bilingual, a young man ‘precariously balanced between a potential commitment to nationalism on the one hand and a potential openness to a multi-cultural reality on the other’.

Bockmuehl is vigorously critical of the still widely prevalent assumption of much Protestant New Testament scholarship, stemming from the writings of F. C. Baur in the first half of the nineteenth century, which, on the basis of a disputable if often unchallenged reading of Galatians 2, sees Peter and Paul as representing two irreconcilably opposed understandings of the gospel. Peter stands for law, Paul for gospel; Peter for Judaism, Paul for the freedom of faith. In all of this Bockmuehl rightly discerns a barely submerged streak of anti-catholicism (‘the instinctive typology of Pauline Reformer versus Petrine Pope’). In his view the letter to the Galatians does indeed witness to a sharp difference between Peter and Paul. But ‘what chiefly divides the two apostles is neither a matter of basic “gospel” doctrine nor straightforwardly of halakhah, but rather the practical (and indeed theologically and halakhically articulated) arbitration between different but equally passionate ecclesial loyalties to the gospel of Jesus Christ.’ In the very same letter Paul speaks of himself and Peter as colleagues, one as apostle to the Jews and the other to the Gentiles. There is also the
evidence of 1 Corinthians. There may be factions appropriating the names of Peter and Paul, but Paul is clear that Paul, Apollos and Cephas 'are united in their role as servants of Christ and stewards of God's mysteries'.

The mainstream patristic reading of the evidence of the New Testament is therefore at least as coherent as that of Baur and those who have followed him, if not more so. When, in the late first century, the Church of Rome remembered Peter and Paul together as martyrs, it was the bearer of a tradition which rightly remembered that they were indeed brothers in life as in death.

Accordingly Bockmuehl refuses to see the Pseudo-Clementine writings, which do indeed have their roots in a tradition of Petrine memory in Syria, as evidence of tradition of Petrine hostility to Paul. He refutes the still current reading of the figure of Simon Magus as a cipher for Paul. The teachings ascribed to Simon are in fact diametrically opposed to those of Paul. Rather they testify to the widespread 'view of Simon as the stylized arch-heretic and founding representative of all Gnostic errors'.

So much for the modern traditions of interpretation which Markus Bockmuehl rejects. His positive interest is in the operation of 'living' memory within the Christian communities of the first and second centuries. He points to the fact that, whilst contemporary evidence of someone's life is invaluable, no overall assessment is possible until the life is finished. 'History must be past before we can know it at all.' 'We need in fact both proximity and distance to get a proper vision and perspective of individuals in the past. Biblical studies in particular have tended too unilaterally to assume that the closer our sources get to the event, the “better” must be the historical vision they promise.' The 'historical Peter' is even more elusive than the 'historical Jesus.' 'In this context ... the present volume seeks to illustrate and annotate the historical by means of the remembered Peter, and vice versa.'

Bockmuehl identifies three generations of 'living memory', 'from apostles via their pupils to the pupils' eyewitnesses'. Throughout the second century appeal could and would be made to the testimony of the 'living voice'. After that point there is the appeal to written testimony rather than personal memory. Memory is replaced by scripture. Hence the importance of settling the canon of sacred writings while living memory is still available as a vital criterion alongside consonance with the teaching received from reliable witnesses. There is the illuminating case of Bishop Serapion of Antioch, asked to adjudicate on whether or not the Gospel of Peter should be allowed for reading in church.