

7-2007

Memory, Tradition and Text: Uses of the Past in Early Christianity [Review]

Rubén R. Dupertuis

Trinity University, rdupertu@trinity.edu

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.trinity.edu/relig_faculty



Part of the [Religion Commons](#)

Repository Citation

Dupertuis, R. R. (2007). [Review of the book *Memory, tradition and text: Uses of the past in early Christianity*, by A. Kirk & T. Thatcher (Eds.)]. *Religious Studies Review*, 33, 246. doi: 10.1111/j.1748-0922.2007.00204_6.x

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Religion Department at Digital Commons @ Trinity. It has been accepted for inclusion in Religion Faculty Research by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Trinity. For more information, please contact jcostanz@trinity.edu.

bined with the book's size, makes quick-referencing unwieldy. The exorbitant price of the volume will limit its purchase by students or scholars, and will make this important book a library acquisition.

Michael Heintz
University of Notre Dame

MEMORY, TRADITION AND TEXT: USES OF THE PAST IN EARLY CHRISTIANITY. Edited By Alan Kirk and Tom Thatcher. *Semeia Studies 52*. Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2005. Pp. ix + 282. N.p., ISBN 978-1-58983-149-0.

The aim of this collection of essays is, at least in part, to remedy the lack of attention that studies of early Christianity have paid to recent developments, in the fields of sociology and anthropology, in the study of memory. An excellent introductory survey by Alan Kirk of recent developments in memory studies is followed by eleven essays applying some aspect of the approach to various texts or problems in the study of early Christianity, and then by responses by Werner Kelber and Barry Schwartz. While the various contributions interact in different ways with the relevant theories and models, all share an understanding of memory as a complex interaction between knowledge of the past and its appropriation in the present. Although the collection as a whole is strong, a few essays stand out: Richard Horsley's "Prominent Patterns in the Social Memory of Jesus and Friends," in which he locates possible continuity between Jesus and later literary traditions such as Q and Mark in general patterns of Israelite social memory; and Phillip Esler's reading of the Israelite heroes presented in Heb 11. The insights generated by the application of memory studies to the study of early Christianity are welcome, and, as the editors suggest, long overdue.

Rubén R. Dupertuis
Trinity University

ONE TEXT, A THOUSAND METHODS: STUDIES IN MEMORY OF SJEF VAN TILBORG. Edited By Patrick Chatelion Counet and Ulrich Berges. *Biblical Interpretation Series, 71*. Boston: E.J. Brill, 2004. Pp. vii + 368. \$159.00, ISBN 0-391-04230-0.

This volume is comprised of fifteen essays to commemorate the achievements of van Tilborg, a biblical studies scholar from the University of Nijmegen. To honor van Tilborg's interest in literary criticism, the editors asked each of the contributors to apply a favorite critical method to a specific biblical text. The result is a diverse collection of articles that employ such literary approaches as intertextuality, composition-criticism, cognitive linguistics, and narratology. The first part focuses on the OT, covering textual issues in Jonah, Isaiah (22:1-14; 40:1-11; 40-55), the Psalms (35; 69), and Genesis (28:10-22) as well as a theological inquiry into the nature of God in Lamentations. The second section primarily centers on the NT, specifically the Gospels

(Luke 12:35-48; John 8), Paul (Galatians 1:1-10), Acts (8:26-40), and two thematic essays (resurrection in the gospels and the stylistic features of the Fourth Gospel). A concluding essay addresses biblical reading strategies in medieval mysticism. While the studies succeed in demonstrating the Bible's multivocality, they are very technical and assume a thorough knowledge of literary theory and its use in biblical studies. As a result, readership will likely be restricted to specialists, especially those who have a particular interest in the topics addressed.

David M. Reis
University of Oregon

THE SPREAD OF CHRISTIANITY IN THE FIRST FOUR CENTURIES: ESSAYS IN EXPLANATION. Edited By W.V. Harris. *Columbia Studies in the Classical Tradition, 27*. Leiden, The Netherlands: E.J. Brill, 2005. Pp. vii + 178. \$134.00, ISBN 90-04-14717-9.

The Spread of Christianity consists of eight essays, seven of which were originally presented at a 2003 conference at Columbia University on the same topic. As with most edited collections, the articles represent wide-ranging interests, from metahistorical treatments assessing Christianity's place in the late antique world to studies dealing with more specific problems. Moreover, they do not, in the end, offer a systematic or comprehensive explanation for Christianity's eventual triumph. Nevertheless, a common thread in many of the essays is an engagement with the legacy of E. Gibbon. The contributors evaluate the historian's explanation for Christianity's success in light of recent advances in the social sciences and rhetorical criticism. For these authors, categories such as the mysterious or the miraculous are insufficient for explaining Christian development. In their place, some writers find that Christian expansion is more likely the product of growth rate patterns or the ability of its leadership to construct a "totalizing" ideology. Others highlight the powers of persuasion that Christian authors employed as they vied for converts within the contentious "marketplace" of ideas. Even though many of the articles are relatively short and in need of more extensive argumentation, specialists in late antiquity will find that they contain important insights that should spark further inquiry and conversation.

David M. Reis
University of Oregon

THE SEARCH FOR THE CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE OF GOD: THE ARIAN CONTROVERSY 318-381. By R. P. C. Hanson. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006. Pp. xxi + 960. \$54.99, ISBN 0-8010-3146-X.

Baker Academic Press has produced, for the first time in paperback, Hanson's classic account (first published in 1988) of the fourth-century Christological and Trinitarian debates; this is not a revision, but merely a republication of the 1988 text. Hanson's work appeared a decade after