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Laing's "Retrieving history: Memory and identity formation in the early church" (book review)

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Book Reviews



Laing, S. D. (2017). *Retrieving history: Memory and identity formation in the early church*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic. 216 pp. \$24.99. ISBN 9780801096433

The modern evangelical church is experiencing an identity crisis contends Stefana Laing, author of *Retrieving History*. Without concentrated effort to remember its past, the church is certain never to actualize its true identity now or in the future. Efforts to preserve the collective memory of the church, and subsequently to secure its identity, should begin with revisiting and closely studying its earliest historical writings. Laing (PhD, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary) is a librarian at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary's Houston campus and a patristics scholar who has taught at several institutions of higher education in the South. Her present work on early church historiography, which focuses on the time from the era of the apostles through the mid-fifth century A.D., is not yet another new introductory patristics textbook, rather it is a corollary to such works, focusing more on providing in-depth, scholarly analysis of the products of historical writing. Laing's examination focuses on four forms of historical writing: historical apologetic, heresiology (history of heresy), hagiography (sacred biographies), and ecclesiastical history. The analysis of each form includes biblical examples, models, or influences in order to emphasize the continuity of biblical Christian identity throughout time. In addition, Laing's analysis highlights several intrinsic historiographical characteristics and features, including narrative, remembrance, mimesis (or imitation), and causation. Examples of historical writings from early church writers, both well-known and obscure, serve to validate and substantiate these claims. The work is well-documented, logically and consistently organized, and accessible to a wide audience. Laing's critical analysis of early historical writings makes the volume a welcome, even necessary, addition to any collection serving researchers of early church history.

Reviewer

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