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

Rusty Tryon
Louisiana College

The Christian Librarian is the official publication of the Association of Christian Librarians (ACL). To learn more about ACL and its products and services please visit //www.acl.org/

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/tcl

Part of the Biblical Studies Commons, Christianity Commons, and the History of Christianity Commons

Recommended Citation
Tryon, Rusty (2018) "Laing's 'Retrieving history: Memory and identity formation in the early church' (book review)," The Christian Librarian: Vol. 61 : Iss. 1 , Article 103.
Available at: http://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/tcl/vol61/iss1/103

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by Digital Commons @ George Fox University. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Christian Librarian by an authorized editor of Digital Commons @ George Fox University. For more information, please contact arolfe@georgefox.edu.

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**
Rusty Tryon, Louisiana College