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Social Memory Theory and Gospels Research: The First Decade (Part One)[1]

Den größten Einfluss auf die ntl. Wissenschaft hat die Gedächtnisforschung ausgeübt.
(Ruben Zimmermann)[2]

As many roads lead to memory as to Rome.
(Aleida Assmann)[3]

In der neutestamentlichen Wissenschaft des englischen Sprachbereichs liegt seit 2005 eine grundlegende Einführung in die *social memory theory* vor. Seitdem hat die neue Forschungsrichtung ebenso rasch Befürworter wie Gegner gefunden. Viele Schlüsselfragen der neutestamentlichen Exegese werden inzwischen unter der Perspektive des sogenannten *„memory approach"* diskutiert. Dieser zweiteilige Beitrag befasst sich mit dem *status quaestionis* nach den ersten zehn Jahren *social memory research* in der Evangelienforschung. Der erste Teil konzentriert sich auf die Arbeit dreier einschlägiger Theoretiker, deren Beitrag für die Evangelienforschung von besonderer Bedeutung ist: Maurice Halbwachs, Jan Assmann und Barry Schwartz.

Keywords: social memory theory, cultural memory theory, Maurice Halbwachs, Jan Assmann, Barry Schwartz, Gospels

In a footnote in his 1971 *The Myth of Christian Beginnings*, Robert Wilken cited French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs's *Les cadres sociaux de la mémoire, La mémoire collective,* and *La topographie légendaire des Évangiles*

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en Terre Sainte.[4] To my knowledge, this citation is the very first interaction between scholars of the New Testament and what has become known as social memory theory. It would be another twenty-one years before Halbwachs's seminal *Les cadres sociaux de la mémoire* (or sections of it) appeared in English.[5] Despite several short applications in essays, it would be yet another twelve years beyond that before Alan Kirk and Tom Thatcher formed the Mapping Memory Consultation of the Society of Biblical Literature in 2004. A year later, English-speaking New Testament scholarship received a formal introduction to the theory in Kirk and Thatcher's 2005 Semeia volume *Memory, Tradition, and Text.*[6] Cilliers Breytenbach and Jens Schröter were years ahead of this trend, applying the insights of Jan and Aleida Assmann's cultural memory theory as early as 1992 and

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4 R. Wilken, *The Myth of Christian Beginnings* (Notre Dame, Ind., 1971), 207 n. 7; M. Halbwachs, *Les cadres sociaux de la mémoire* (Paris, 1952 [1925]); id., *La Mémoire Collective* (Paris, 1950); id., *La topographie légendaire des Évangiles en Terre Sainte: Étude de mémoire collective* (Paris, 1941).

5 M. Halbwachs, *The Social Frameworks of Memory,* in his *On Collective Memory* (ed. and trans. L.A. Coser; Chicago, 1992), 35–189. This volume includes Coser's translations of sections of *Les cadres sociaux de la mémoire,* as well as the conclusion of Halbwachs's *La topographie légendaire des Évangiles.* Cf. also the earlier translation of Halbwachs's posthumous *La mémoire collective* as *The Collective Memory* (trans. F.J. Ditter, Jr. and V.Y. Ditter; New York, 1980). Coser, introduction to *On Collective Memory* by Maurice Halbwachs, 1–34, here 2, refers to *The Collective Memory* as "akin to a skeleton" and adds, "One may doubt that the author himself would have been willing to publish it in what seems to be an unfinished state." Cf., however, G. Truc, "Memory of Places and Places of Memory: For a Halbwachsian Socio-Ethnography of Collective Memory," *ISSJ* 62.203–204 (2011), 147–159, here 147, who criticizes memory theorists for not being more familiar with this work.

6 A. Kirk and T. Thatcher (eds.), *Memory, Tradition, and Text: Uses of the Past in Early Christianity* (SemeiaSt 52; Atlanta, 2005). One year later, *Biblical Theology Bulletin* dedicated a volume to social memory theory (*BTB* 36.1 [2006]) and another year after that saw the publication of L. Stuckenbruck, S.C. Barton, and B.G. Wold (eds.), *Memory in the Bible and Antiquity* (WUNT 212; Tübingen, 2007). Publications that appeared prior to Kirk and Thatcher's Semeia volume include M.I. Aguilar, "Rethinking the Judean Past: Questions of History and a Social Archaeology of Memory in the First Book of the Maccabees," *BTB* 30 (2000), 58–67; id., "The Archaeology of Memory and the Issue of Colonialism: Mimesis and the Controversial Tribute to Caesar in Mark 12:13–17," *BTB* 35 (2005), 60–66; Y.Z. Eliav, "The Tomb of James, Brother of Jesus, as *Locus Memoriae*," *HTR* 97.1 (2004), 33–59; P.F. Esler, *Conflict and Identity in Romans: The Social Setting of Paul's Letter* (Minneapolis, 2003), 174–175; G.M. Keightley, "The Church's Memory of Jesus: A Social Science Analysis of 1 Thessalonians," *BTB* 17 (1987), 149–156; A. Kirk, "The Johannine Jesus in the Gospel of Peter: A Social Memory Approach," in *Jesus in Johannine Tradition* (ed. R.T. Fortna and T. Thatcher; Louisville, Ky., 2001), 313–321; D. Mendels, *Memory in Jewish, Pagan and Christian Societies of the Graeco-Roman World* (LSTS 45; London, 2004). See also n. 7 below and cf. S. Byrskog, *Story as History – History as Story* (WUNT 123; Tübingen, 2000), 255.

1997, respectively.[7] With the exceptions of James Dunn's and Kirk and Thatcher's citations of Schröter, these contributions went largely over-looked in English-speaking scholarship.[8] In the early 2000s, Kirk and Thatcher could still rightly claim, "It is surprising that social memory theory has, as yet, made no significant impact on Biblical Studies."[9]

These words are true no longer, however. In a relatively short amount of time, social memory theory has exploded onto Gospels scholarship (and Biblical Studies generally). Gospels scholars are now approaching stand-ard issues in terms of this "memory approach" and publishing sustained treatments,[10] including those stemming from graduate, doctoral, and postdoctoral research.[11]

Not all scholars believe this is a profitable line of enquiry, however. Paul Foster has recently claimed that memory theory is a "dead end" in histor-ical Jesus studies and offers "no significant advance" beyond form criti-cism.[12] He questions the understanding of New Testament scholars who use memory theory[13] and, grouping applications of orality studies (which he also labels a "dead end") and memory studies together, claims

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7   C. Breytenbach, "Vormarkinische Logientradition: Parallelen in der urchristlichen Briefliteratur," in *The Four Gospels 1992: Festschrift Frans Neirynck* (ed. F. Van Seg-broeck et al.; 3 vols.; BETL 100; Leuven, 1992), 2.725–749, here 728–729, 749 n. 103; J. Schröter, *Erinnerung an Jesu Worte: Studien zur Rezeption der Logienüberliefe-rung in Markus, Q und Thomas* (WMANT 76; Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1997), 49, 57, 462–466. Cf. also G. Theissen, "Tradition und Entscheidung: Der Beitrag der biblischen Glaubens zum kulturellen Gedächtnis," in *Kultur und Gedächtnis* (ed. J. Assmann and T. Hölscher; stw 724; Frankfurt am Main, 1988), 170–196.

8   J.D.G. Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, vol. 1 of *Christianity in the Making* (Grand Rapids, Mich., 2003), throughout; A. Kirk and T. Thatcher, "Jesus Tradition as Social Memory," in *Memory, Tradition, and Text* (see n. 6), 25–42, here 33–34, 38–39.

9   Kirk and Thatcher, "Jesus Tradition" (see n. 8), 25. Cf., however, Mendels, *Memory* (see n. 6); M.A. Signer (ed.), *Memory and History in Christianity and Judaism* (Notre Dame, Ind., 2001).

10 R.K. McIver, *Memory, Jesus, and the Synoptic Gospels* (RBS 59; Atlanta, 2011).

11 To my knowledge, the first MA thesis on social memory theory and the Gospels is C. Keith, "The Saliency of a Psalm: The Markan Crucifixion as Social Memory" (MA the-sis, Cincinnati Christian University, 2005). The first two published PhD dissertations were A. Le Donne, *The Historiographical Jesus: Memory, Typology, and the Son of David* (Waco, Tex., 2009); R. Rodríguez, *Structuring Early Christian Memory: Jesus in Tradi-tion, Performance and Text* (LNTS 407; London, 2010). The first *Habilitationschrift* on social memory is S. Hübenthal, *Das Markusevangelium als kollektives Gedächtnis* (FRLANT 253; Göttingen, 2014).

12 P. Foster, "Memory, Orality, and the Fourth Gospel: Three Dead-Ends in Historical Jesus Research," *JSHJ* 10 (2012), 191–227; first quotation from title; second quotation from p. 191.

13 Foster, "Memory" (see n. 12), 200. Foster here cites R. Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewit-nesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony* (Grand Rapids, Mich., 2006), 352.

that neither group of New Testament scholars seems to know the field that they are importing: "Those who apply the respective forms of theory described here do not appear to be cognizant of the fact that within the disciplines from which these theories are imported, the forms used as a breakthrough in New Testament studies are seen as being outmoded and largely flawed."[14] Foster's major criticism of the memory approach concerns "over-confident application of such approaches to the 'historical Jesus question'" that affirm the Gospel tradition as reliable.[15] Zeba Crook has voiced similar criticisms. He claims, "Memory theory is being used, if not explicitly to buttress the reliability of the Gospel portraits of Jesus, to do so implicitly," which he says is only possible "by ignoring the full implications of memory theory."[16]

I will argue in this essay, particularly in Part Two, that such critiques, though accurate in some important respects, grossly misrepresent the full breadth of applications of memory theory to the Gospels. I will argue further that social memory theory – as theory – neither affirms nor denies the reliability of the Gospel tradition.[17] But these and other[18] critiques are important since they signal a certain maturation of social memory theory's presence in New Testament studies and raise the question of its contribu-

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14 Foster, "Memory" (see n. 12), 226.

15 Foster, "Memory" (see n. 12), 191.

16 Z.A. Crook, "Collective Memory Distortion and the Quest for the Historical Jesus," *JSHJ* 11 (2013), 53–76, here 53; see also id., "Memory and the Historical Jesus," *BTB* 42 (2012), 196–203. Cf. the response from A. Le Donne, "The Problem of Selectivity in Memory Research: A Response to Zeba Crook," *JSHJ* 11 (2013), 77–97, and the rejoinder of Z.A. Crook, "Gratitude and Comments to Le Donne," *JSHJ* 11 (2013), 98–105.

17 After delivering the lecture upon which this essay is based and submitting the written form to *Early Christianity* in October 2013, I noted that S.J. Joseph, *The Nonviolent Messiah: Jesus, Q, and the Enochic Tradition* (Minneapolis, 2014), 6, seemed to be dependent upon this sentence, another in Part Two (see n. 1), and a February 2013 blog post of mine published on "The Jesus Blog" (C. Keith, "Paul Foster's Provocative *JSHJ* Article", http://historicaljesusresearch.blogspot.co.uk/2013/02/paul-fosters-provocative-jshj.html, cited 12 February 2015). After contacting Joseph, he acknowledged the failed citation and dependence upon a video of the lecture. He also kindly posted an apology, for which I am grateful (S.J. Joseph, "Chris Keith on Social Memory Theory", http://simonjjoseph.blogspot.co.uk/2015/02/chris-keith-on-social-memory-theory.html, cited 12 February 2015).

18 A.J.M. Wedderburn, *Jesus and the Historians* (WUNT 269; Tübingen, 2010), v–vii, 13–49, 189–223. Wedderburn admirably names the proverbial elephant in the room: "And it is this possible discomfort [produced by answering some of the 'old questions involved in the historical study of Jesus'] that arouses in me the suspicion that one of the attractions of newer historiographical theorizing for some may be the possibility of evading such unwelcome implications of historical criticism" (ibid., v; cf. pp. 142–143, 329).

tion to the discipline. As we close the first decade of this interdisciplinary conversation, then, we are in position to assess the contributions of social memory theory to Gospels scholarship as well as its limitations. I therefore offer the following two-part *status quaestionis* essay. Part One will present the methodological foundations of social memory theory, which Gospels scholars have sometimes overlooked or inadequately engaged. This presentation of critical thinkers is important because, in the words of Simon Price, "Before one can think about the relationship of social memory and political power one needs to understand how social memory actually works."[19] Part Two will then assess current applications of social memory theory in four areas of Jesus studies related to the interaction of the past and the present in the formation of the Jesus tradition: transmission of the oral Jesus tradition; criteria of authenticity; the new historiography; and the historical reliability of the Gospels. Overall, I argue that, although social memory theory has suffered abuse by its supporters and detractors alike in Gospels studies, it continues to hold great promise for Jesus studies as the discipline moves steadily beyond modernist conceptions of early Christian transmission of the past that all too often fail to appreciate how early Christians themselves thought of the past.

The roots of social memory theory reach into numerous philosophical, linguistic, anthropological, and sociological fields of research. The significant contributors to critical discourse on memory thus comprise an impressive list of scholars from various time periods and disciplines: Sigmund Freud; Karl Marx; Claude Lévi-Strauss; Friedrich Nietzsche; Michel Foucault; Jacques Derrida; Hans-Georg Gadamer; Pierre Nora; Paul Ricoeur; and many others.[20] Most important for understanding the current state of Gospels scholarship in light of social memory theory are Maurice Halbwachs, Jan Assmann, and Barry Schwartz. Halbwachs was the founder of social memory theory while Assmann and Schwartz are the leading voices in Germany and the United States, respectively. For each scholar, I will briefly describe his approach to social memory and the most significant aspects of his writings for the discussion of social

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19 S. Price, "Memory and Ancient Greece," in *Historical and Religious Memory in the Ancient World* (ed. B. Dignas and R.R.R. Smith; Oxford, 2012), 15–36, here 16.

20 See J.K. Olick, V. Vinitzky-Seroussi, and D. Levy, *The Collective Memory Reader* (New York, 2011).

memory theory applications to the Gospels in Part Two (for example, the actual past).[21]

1. Maurice Halbwachs and Collective Memory

Under the influences of philosopher Henri Bergson and sociologist Emile Durkheim, Maurice Halbwachs was the first scholar to develop a sociological approach to memory in his 1925 *The Social Frameworks of Memory*. He is thus considered "the founding father of the sociology of collective memory."[22] Halbwachs argues consistently against the psychological view of memory as a store-and-retrieval function that primarily concerns the preservation of the past in an individual's mind. He insists instead that memories are always recalled from, and thus structured by, the social demands of the present.[23] For Halbwachs, therefore, memory is not primarily a past-oriented function of the individual; it is a present-oriented function of the individual-in-society.[24] Accordingly, "There is no point in seeking where [memories] are preserved in my brain or in some nook of my mind to which I alone have access: for they are recalled to me externally, and the groups of which I am a part at any time give me the means to reconstruct them."[25]

Although sometimes less than clear (see below), Halbwachs does not ignore the role of the individual in emphasizing the influence of the

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21 Thus, this *status quaestionis* essay will make no attempt at a full introduction to social memory or its applications to New Testament studies in general. In my estimation, the single best introduction is A. Kirk, "Social and Cultural Memory," in *Memory, Tradition, and Text* (see n. 6), 1–24. See also J. Assmann, *Religion and Cultural Memory* (trans. R. Livingstone; Stanford, Calif., 2006), 1–30; Hübenthal, *Markusevangelium* (see n. 11), 77–150; Kirk and Thatcher, "Jesus Tradition" (see n. 8), 25–42.

22 J.K. Olick, *In the House of the Hangman: The Agonies of German Defeat, 1943–1949* (Chicago, 2005), 336.

23 Halbwachs, *Social Frameworks* (see n. 5): "Everything seems to indicate that the past is not preserved but is reconstructed on the basis of the present" (39–40); "No memory is possible outside frameworks used by people living in society to determine and retrieve their recollections" (43); "Here it is only one framework that counts – that which is constituted by the commandments of our present society and which necessarily excludes all others" (50); "But I believe that the mind reconstructs its memories under the pressure of society" (51).

24 Halbwachs, *Social Frameworks* (see n. 5), 48: "It is individuals as group members who remember."

25 Halbwachs, *Social Frameworks* (see n. 5), 38.

group.[26] His point is simply that the individual borrows from society everything that enables conceptualization of the past. "Individual memory could not function without words and ideas, instruments that the individual has not invented but appropriated from his milieu."[27] Thus, the present group environment structures the (re)construction of the past even for the individual. "It is in this sense that there exists a collective memory and social frameworks for memory; it is to the degree that our individual thought places itself in these frameworks and participates in this memory that it is capable of the act of recollection."[28]

As this last quotation indicates, Halbwachs uses the terms "social memory" and "collective memory" in overlapping but distinct ways.[29] When he speaks of social memory, or social frameworks of memory, he refers to the impact of present society upon the individual: "The individual calls recollections to mind by relying on the frameworks of social memory."[30] Collective memory instead refers to a shared cultural past to which individuals contribute and upon which they call; but ultimately a past that transcends individual memory. Since collective memory is crucial for informing group identity, it is a past that the group actively manages. Collective memory is, in other words, "an intentional formation of the past."[31] In a related sense, Halbwachs distinguishes between the "autobiographical memory" of an individual and the "historical memory" of a group.[32] One could theoretically conceptualize individual memory and collective

26 Halbwachs, *Social Frameworks* (see n. 5), 49: "Our memories, especially the earliest ones, are indeed *our* memories: those who might read them in us as well as we read them ourselves have either vanished or been dispersed" (emphasis original).

27 Halbwachs, *The Collective Memory* (see n. 5), 51. Similarly, id., *Social Frameworks* (see n. 5), 38: "Yet it is in society that people normally acquire their memories. It is also in society that they recall, recognize, and localize their memories." Reflecting on Halbwachs, J. Assmann, *Religion* (see n. 21), 1–2, says, "In the act of remembering we do not just descend into the depths of our own most intimate inner life, but we introduce an order and a structure into that internal life that are socially conditioned and that link us to the social world."

28 Halbwachs, *Social Frameworks* (see n. 5), 38.

29 On this point, see also S. Hübenthal, "Social and Cultural Memory in Biblical Exegesis: The Quest for an Adequate Application," in *Cultural Memory in Biblical Exegesis* (ed. P. Carstens, T.B. Hasselbalch, and N.P. Lemche; PHSC 17; Piscataway, N.J., 2012), 191–216, here 196–197; Le Donne, *Historiographical Jesus* (see n. 11), 42 n. 8.

30 Halbwachs, *Social Frameworks* (see n. 5), 182.

31 Hübenthal, "Social and Cultural Memory" (see n. 29), 197. Consider Halbwachs, *Social Frameworks* (see n. 5), 51: "Society from time to time obligates people not just to reproduce in thought previous events of their lives, but also to touch them up, to shorten them, or to complete them so that, however convinced we are that our memories are exact, we give them a prestige that reality did not possess."

32 Halbwachs, *The Collective Memory* (see n. 5), 50–55.

memory as two poles on a spectrum. At one end, individual memory re-
calls and reconstructs the past on the basis of shared social frameworks but
in forms that are unique to the individual; at the other end, collective
memory recalls and reconstructs the past in public forms that are unique
to a current group. Hübenthal thus provides the examples of a personal
diary as individual memory and a family chronicle as collective memory.[33]
But – and this is the really important point for Halbwachs – regardless of
where any given commemorative activity falls upon that spectrum, the in-
dividual is never isolated from society and society is never isolated from
individuals.[34]

Halbwachs's theory of memory is not a flawless system. First, although
he clearly reserves a role for the individual in some statements, other state-
ments are dangerously close to treating the individual as a reflective au-
tomaton of society.[35] Ricoeur thus accuses Halbwachs of "cross[ing] an in-
visible line, the line separating the thesis 'no one ever remembers alone'
from the thesis 'we are not an authentic subject of the attribution of mem-
ories.'"[36] Second, Halbwachs's theories often consist of sweeping general-
izations that are unverifiable.[37] Third, and more important, despite its cru-
cial role in his overall thinking, "the past" remains a rather ill-defined con-
cept for Halbwachs. Regardless of what it *was* for him, it was *not* what we
could call "the actual past" or "what really happened." He is not oblivious
to the concept of the *passé réel* since he elsewhere references it.[38] He is sim-
ply uninterested in it and even locates concern about the survival of space-
time events in consciousness outside the discipline entirely in a footnote in
Social Frameworks.

Clearly, I do not in any way dispute that our impressions perdure for some time, in some
cases for a long time, after they have been produced. But this "resonance" of impressions
is not to be confused at all with the preservation of memories. This resonance varies from
individual to individual, just as it undoubtedly does from type to type, completely aside

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33 Hübenthal, "Social and Cultural Memory" (see n. 29), 197.

34 Thus, Coser, introduction (see n. 5), 22, clarifies, "Nor is it [collective memory] some
   mystical group mind."

35 For example, see the quotations in nn. 23 and 24 above.

36 P. Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting* (trans. K. Blamey and D. Pellauer; Chicago,
   2004), 122

37 See, for example, his thoughts on what happens when people sleep or read a book, or his
   assessment of the difference between interest in the past for the elderly and the youth in
   Halbwachs, *Social Frameworks* (see n. 5), 41–42, 46, 48, respectively.

38 Halbwachs, *Social Frameworks* (see n. 5), 108; for French, see id., *Les cadres sociaux* (see
   n. 4), 209.

from social influence. It relates to psycho-physiology, which has its domain, just as social psychology has its own.[39]

This statement is highly significant for Part Two of this essay and I will return to it.

These criticisms aside, Halbwachs's insights concerning the impact of the present on the formation and articulation of memory have proven not only accurate but immensely fertile. They have spawned a discourse of social or collective memory theory that crosses a plethora of disciplines, topics, and ideological perspectives.[40] At least three aspects of Halbwachs's work and legacy are particularly significant for Gospels studies: the actual past; the two schools of memory; and his discussions of early Christianity.

1.1. Collective Memory and the Actual Past

First, to reiterate a point just made, collective memory according to Halbwachs is unconcerned with issues relating to the actual past. It is precisely this notion of memory as a preservation function against which Halbwachs rails. This point bears repeating because in colloquial language we often juxtapose "memory" of the past with "invention" of the past, thereby imbuing "memory" with a meaning that is akin to historical accuracy. Importing this common understanding of memory to social memory discourse would be a category mistake. Collective memory refers to the representation of the past in light of the needs of the present with no automatic assumption at the outset concerning the degree to which that representation may reflect past reality.

1.2. The Two Schools of Collective Memory

Despite Halbwachs, interest in the actual past and its influence upon collective memory has not remained outside the boundaries of social memory research. Several factors are responsible for this development, one of

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39 Halbwachs, *Social Frameworks* (see n. 5), 40 n. 3.
40 See the descriptions in A. Erll, "Cultural Memory Studies: An Introduction," in *Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook* (ed. A. Erll, A. Nünning, and S.B. Young; Berlin, 2008), 1–15; J.K. Olick and J. Robbins, "Social Memory Studies: From 'Collective Memory' to the Historical Sociology of Mnemonic Practices," *Annual Review of Sociology* 24 (1998), 105–140; J.K. Olick, V. Vinitzky-Seroussi, and D. Levy, introduction to *Collective Memory Reader* (see n. 20), 3–62, here 22–29; B. Zelizer, "Reading the Past against the Grain: The Shape of Memory Studies," *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 12 (1995), 214–239.

which is the second significant aspect of Halbwachs's work.[41] Halbwachs's concentration upon the role of the present in memory at the expense of the past led eventually to two schools of social/collective memory theory. One school follows Halbwachs's emphasis upon the present and is thus termed "presentism," "social constructionism," or "constructivism."[42] Presentists are primarily concerned with the ways in which present interests exploit the past and exercise their will over it. In contrast, scholars who affirm "the continuity perspective"[43] or "essentialist position"[44] (associated primarily with Barry Schwartz, see below) place equal emphasis upon the past, asserting that Halbwachs's near single-minded focus upon the present neglected the ways in which the past (and past interpretations of the past) can constitute or contribute to the social frameworks of the present. That is, although not denying Halbwachs's insights concerning the socially-constructed nature of memory and the role of the present, they argue that the relationship between the past and the present in memory is not a one-way street but rather a more complex phenomenon of mutual influence. For, "when pushed to the extreme [...] presentism undermines all historical continuity."[45]

1.3. Halbwachs and Early Christianity

Third, Halbwachs himself saw early Christianity as a prime example of the workings of collective memory. An entire chapter of *Social Frameworks of Memory* is dedicated to "Religious Collective Memory" and deals almost exclusively with Christianity and the early Church. Halbwachs's second major work on collective memory, *The Legendary Topography of the Gospels in the Holy Lands*, which one Halbwachsian scholar describes as "a textbook – even bedtime reading – for anyone seeking to use Halbwachs's

41 Another reason has been developments in historiography wherein history and memory are not viewed as antithetical. See below and Olick, Vinitzky-Seroussi, and Levy, introduction (see n. 40), 43–45.

42 The usage of "presentism" for this perspective appears in the *status quaestionis* essays of Olick and Robbins, "Social Memory Studies" (see n. 40), 108, 128; Zelizer, "Reading the Past" (see n. 40), 227. See also Coser, introduction (see n. 5), 25–26. "Social constructionism" appears in N. Ben-Yehuda, *The Masada Myth: Collective Memory and Mythmaking in Israel* (Madison, Wis., 1995), 22.

43 C. Keith, "Memory and Authenticity: Jesus Tradition and What Really Happened," *ZNW* 102 (2011), 155–177, here 169; id., *Jesus' Literacy: Scribal Culture and the Teacher from Galilee* (LNTS 413; London, 2011), 57, following the description of Schwartz's position in Ben-Yehuda, *Masada Myth* (see n. 42), 22.

44 Olick, Vinizky-Seroussi, and Levy, *Collective Memory Reader* (see n. 20), 242.

45 Zelizer, "Reading the Past" (see n. 40), 227. See also Coser, introduction (see n. 5), 26.

methods to undertake a sociological analysis of memory phenomena,"[46] deals at length with the Gospels and the early Church. In this work, Halbwachs makes ample usage of Ernest Renan's *Life of Jesus* and even claims, "The Gospels already represent a memory or collection of memories held in common by a group."[47]

2. Jan Assmann and Cultural Memory

Halbwachs's work on collective memory had a major influence on Egyptologist Jan Assmann's development of a theory of cultural memory. In a number of publications over more than twenty-five years, Assmann addressed a weakness he perceived in Halbwachs; namely that Halbwachs never applied his insights into group memory at the cultural level in a sustained way.[48] Along with his wife, literary theorist Aleida Assmann, Assmann's impact in German-speaking memory scholarship has been substantial.[49] Only recently have English translations of their most important works appeared.[50]

Jan Assmann's cultural memory theory (upon which I focus here) operates within the ambit of Halbwachs's collective memory, but extends far beyond it.[51] For the living group's collective memory, the primary focus of Halbwachs, Assmann coins the term "communicative memory" (*kommu-*

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46 Truc, "Memory of Places" (see n. 5), 147.

47 Halbwachs, *The Legendary Topography of the Gospels of the Holy Land*, in his *On Collective Memory* (see n. 5), 194. A. Kirk, "Memory Theory and Jesus Research," in *Handbook for the Study of the Historical Jesus* (ed. S.E. Porter and T. Holmén; 4 vols.; Leiden, 2010), 1.809–842, here 820, will later affirm similarly, "The Gospel tradition may be understood as *the artifact of memory*" (emphasis original).

48 J. Assmann, *Cultural Memory and Early Civilization: Writing, Remembrance, and Political Imagination* (Cambridge, 2011), 21–69, esp. 32; id., *Religion* (see n. 21), 1–30, esp. 8, 94–95. As Olick, Vinitzky-Seroussi, and Levy, introduction (see n. 40), 42, note, this critique of Halbwachs is unwarranted since Halbwachs does deal with cases of multiple generations of memory (e.g., in *Legendary Topography* [see n. 47]). Nevertheless, Assmann has given this aspect of memory considerably more articulation than Halbwachs.

49 The first edition of J. Assmann, *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis: Schrift, Erinnerung und politische Identität in frühen Hochkulturen* (Munich) appeared in 1992; its seventh(!) edition had appeared by 2007.

50 A. Assmann, *Cultural Memory* (see n. 3); J. Assmann, *Cultural Memory* (see n. 48); id., *Religion* (see n. 21). For an earlier English study, which includes discussion of mnemohistory and cultural memory, see id., *Moses the Egyptian: The Memory of Egypt in Western Monotheism* (Cambridge, 1997), 8–17.

51 Hübenthal, "Social and Cultural Memory" (see n. 29), 198–201, notes developments in Assmann's concept of cultural memory.

nikatives Gedächtnis).[52] In contrast, "cultural memory" (*kulturelles Gedächtnis*) refers to memorial practices that go beyond living memory and cross generations.[53] "With cultural memory the depths of time open up."[54] In this sense, cultural memory is communicative memory stretched vertically across generations instead of horizontally across individuals,[55] and "what communication is for communicative memory, tradition is for cultural memory."[56] The "cultural texts" (*kulturelle Texte*) that constitute that tradition, whether oral or written texts, serve as the "cement or connective backbone of a society that ensures its identity and coherence through the sequence of generations."[57]

In the words of Schröter, "Assmann hat in diesem Sinn die fundierende Funktion von Geschichte als Erinnerung und Gedächtnis herausgearbeitet. [...] Für das Christentum [...] ließe sich dies in analoger Weise fruchtbar machen."[58] Regarding this fruitfulness as it relates to Gospels research, three issues are particularly worthy of mention: the actual past; media criticism; and Assmann's contribution to Biblical Studies.

2.1. Cultural Memory and the Actual Past

First, like Halbwachs's collective memory, cultural memory is not concerned with the actual past and the discipline of "history" in the sense of verification of historical claims. Assmann instead describes his "investigat[ion] of cultural memory"[59] as "mnemohistory" and claims, "Unlike history proper, mnemohistory is concerned not with the past as such, but only the past as it is remembered. It surveys the story-lines of tradition, the

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52 J. Assmann, *Cultural Memory* (see n. 48), 6, 36; id., *Religion* (see n. 21), 3.

53 J. Assmann discusses the differences between their approach and that of Halbwachs at length in *Cultural Memory* (see n. 48), 21–34; id., *Religion* (see n. 21), 1–9.

54 J. Assmann, *Religion* (see n. 21), 24.

55 J. Assmann, *Moses* (see n. 50), 11; id., *Religion* (see n. 21), 8.

56 J. Assmann, *Religion* (see n. 21), 8.

57 J. Assmann, "Form as Mnemonic Device: Cultural Texts and Cultural Memory," in *Performing the Gospel: Orality, Memory, and Mark* (ed. R.A. Horsley, J.A. Draper, and J.M. Foley; Minneapolis, 2006), 67–82, here 78. See further A. Assmann, "Was sind kulturelle Texte?" in *Literaturkanon – Medienereignis – Kultureller Text: Formen interkultureller Kommunikation und Übersetzung* (ed. A. Poltermann; Berlin, 1995), 232–244; J. Assmann, *Religion* (see n. 21), 104–105.

58 J. Schröter, "Konstruktion von Geschichte und die Anfänge des Christentums: Reflexionen zur christlichen Geschichtsdeutung aus neutestamentlicher Perpektive," in *Von Jesus zum Neuen Testament* (WUNT 204; Tübingen, 2007), 37–54, here 40 n. 17; repr. from *Konstruktion von Wirklichkeit: Beiträge aus geschichtlichtstheoretischer, philosophischer und theologischer Perspektive* (ed. J. Schröter with A. Eddelbüttel; TBT 127; Berlin, 2004), 202–219.

59 J. Assmann, *Moses* (see n. 50), 15.

webs of intertextuality, the diachronic continuities and discontinuities of reading the past."[60] Mnemohistory's aim "is not to ascertain the possible truth of traditions [...] but to study these traditions as phenomena of collective memory."[61]

In addition to important similarities, Assmann's cultural memory theory is also dissimilar from Halbwachs in several manners relating to the past and the actual past. In contrast to Halbwachs, Assmann reserves a firm role for the influence of the past upon the construction of collective memory in the present: "The past is not simply 'received' by the present. The present is 'haunted' by the past and the past is modeled, invented, reinvented, and reconstructed by the present."[62] Assmann thus reveals a more complex interchange between the past and present in his theory of cultural memory. Worth noting is that this does not mean that the influence of the past necessarily derives from the actual past, since "memories may be false, distorted, invented, or implanted."[63]

At the same time, the actual past is not entirely irrelevant for Assmann's cultural memory theory; not because Assmann asserts a direct connection between "history" and "memory" but rather because he conceptualizes them as related. "Mnemohistory is not the opposite of history, but rather is one of its branches or subdisciplines. [...] Mnemohistory is reception theory applied to history."[64] Assmann here reveals an important shift in memory discourse since Halbwachs in the 1920s. Since this very shift is the fault line at which debates over the usefulness of "memory" in historical Jesus research (discussed in Part Two) are occurring, it requires further comment.

To state the previous point in perhaps a more succinct way, Assmann does not so much redefine the relationship between "history" and "memory" as much as he redefines the goals and expectations of "history" in light of "memory." Halbwachs still worked with a positivist understanding of "history" as recovery of raw elements of the past, much as the form critics in Germany understood it at precisely the same historical period. As Assmann notes, "The task of historical positivism consists in separating the historical from the mythical elements in memory and distinguishing the elements which retain the past from those which shape the present."[65]

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60 J. Assmann, *Moses* (see n. 50), 8–9.
61 J. Assmann, *Moses* (see n. 50), 9.
62 J. Assmann, *Moses* (see n. 50), 9.
63 J. Assmann, *Moses* (see n. 50), 9.
64 J. Assmann, *Moses* (see n. 50), 9.
65 J. Assmann, *Moses* (see n. 50), 10.

Halbwachs was interested only in the latter element of this equation, and thus viewed history proper – recovery of the retained past – as the opposite of collective memory, which was thoroughly intertwined with current social realities. "And so for Halbwachs [history] stands outside reality. It is a functionless artifact, isolated from the bonds and obligations imposed by life."[66] In an intriguing aspect of social memory's *Forschungsgeschichte*, then, Halbwachs ironically maintained a positivist understanding of "history" while simultaneously introducing a theory of the past in the form of collective memory that would contribute to the collapse of that very understanding.

Assmann's criticism of Halbwachs in this regard concerns precisely the antithetical relationship between "history" and "memory" that Halbwachs maintains: "This is the point at which I find myself unable to go along with him. The borderlines between memory and tradition can be so flexible that it seems pointless to try and introduce rigid conceptual distinctions."[67] Thus, Assmann rejects the modernist historical positivism that separates "history" from "memory" altogether. He regards this as an "infelicitous opposition between history and myth" because "history turns into myth as soon as it is remembered, narrated, and used, that is, woven into the fabric of the present."[68] In other words, there is no such thing as "history" as such. The actual past can influence the present, but not because it survives in the form of a historical kernel that historians can separate from interpretive frameworks of the present. The actual past or, better stated, the influence of the actual past, persists only in the narrated form it takes in those interpretive frameworks. Any avenue for speculation upon the actual past thus begins not with the question "What of the past can we recover from the present?" but rather "How might the present relate to the actual past?" In terms of method and aims, these are drastically different questions. Although "the historical study of events should be carefully distinguished from the study of their commemoration,"[69] these related interests in the past are not incompatible for Assmann despite the fact that the actual past is not cultural memory theory's primary interest.

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66 J. Assmann, *Cultural Memory* (see n. 48), 30.
67 J. Assmann, *Cultural Memory* (see n. 48), 30; see also p. 110.
68 J. Assmann, *Moses* (see n. 50), 14.
69 J. Assmann, *Moses* (see n. 50), 14.

2.2. Cultural Memory as Media Criticism

Second, with Assmann's cultural memory theory, one takes a decisive step into media criticism of the ancient world. In fact, the relationship between the oral and the written lies at the very base of Assmann's theory. He views the technology of writing as the decisive enabling catalyst for trans-generational cultural memory because writing enables an "extended situation" (*zerdehnte Situation*) beyond a transmission context of copresence.[70] Oral cultures have cultural memory, which they transmit in the form of oral tradition and ritual/festival.[71] But these contexts of transmission demand the simultaneous presence of the transmitter and the receiver of the cultural texts. Written texts are not so restricted since they can cross land, sea, and decades so long as the papyrus survives and there is someone who can read the language on the other end. Thus, "Only with the emergence of writing does cultural memory 'take off' and allow the horizon of symbolically stored memory to grow far beyond the framework of knowledge functionalized as bonding memory."[72]

The extended situation of textuality is key for two other important aspects of Assmann's cultural memory theory: the "breakdown in tradition" (*Traditionsbruch*) and canonization. Assmann consistently postulates "a critical incursion into the collective memory" (*eine Krise in der kollektiven Erinnerung*) at the forty-year mark for a culture as the originating generation passes from life, referring to this crisis as a *Traditionsbruch*.[73] At such a time, communicative memory must be transferred to cultural memory if it is to survive.[74] Textuality can enable this process distinctly in view of its capacity to enable an extended situation, providing any current generation with a symbolic touchstone with generations past. Strongly related to this function of written texts, they thereby also foster a culture of interpretation in a manner that oral tradition, in Assmann's scheme, does not.[75]

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70 J. Assmann, *Cultural Memory* (see n. 48), 7–8; id., *Religion* (see n. 21), 28, 103; cf. id., "Form" (see n. 57), 75. See further K. Ehlich, "Text und sprachliches Handeln: Die Entstehung von Texten aus dem Bedürfnis nach Überlieferung," in *Schrift und Gedächtnis: Beiträge zur Archäologie der literarischen Kommunikation* (ed. A. and J. Assmann, and C. Hardmeier; Munich, 1983), 24–43.

71 J. Assmann, *Cultural Memory* (see n. 48), 7–8; id., *Religion* (see n. 21), 39–40, 105.

72 J. Assmann, *Religion* (see n. 21), 21; see also id., *Cultural Memory* (see n. 48), 8; id., "Form" (see n. 57), 77.

73 J. Assmann, *Cultural Memory* (see n. 48), vii, 36, 195, 196 (quotation; for German see *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis* [see n. 49], 218).

74 J. Assmann, *Cultural Memory* (see n. 48), 196.

75 J. Assmann, *Religion* (see n. 21), 40–41; cf. p. 69.

Therefore, textualization is a crucial step "along the road [to] canonization."[76]

2.3. Assmann and Biblical Studies

Third, like Halbwachs, Assmann developed his theory of memory in light of, and upon, biblical texts. He viewed ancient Israel as an example par excellence of the workings of cultural memory and begins his landmark *Cultural Memory and Early Civilization* with a discussion of the Pentateuch.[77] His writings are replete with discussions of Old Testament/Hebrew Bible texts and traditions. Assmann's comments on the aims of his study of Moses in European cultural memory draw together all three of the previous points:

Mnemohistory does not ask, "Was Moses really trained in all the wisdom of the Egyptians?" Instead, it asks, why such a statement did not appear in the book of Exodus, but only appeared in Acts (7:22), and why the Moses discourse in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries almost exclusively based its image of Moses not on Moses' elaborate biography in the Pentateuch, but on this single verse in the New Testament.[78]

Assmann also interacts with the work of New Testament scholar Gerd Theissen[79] and, like Halbwachs, treats the Jesus tradition as cultural memory.[80]

3. Barry Schwartz and the Continuity Perspective

Over roughly the same time period that Assmann has been shepherding the legacy of Halbwachs in Germany, sociologist Barry Schwartz has been performing the same task in the United States.[81] He is thus considered "the father of collective memory studies in contemporary American sociolo-

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76 J. Assmann, *Religion* (see n. 21), 71.
77 J. Assmann, *Cultural Memory* (see n. 48), 1–3.
78 J. Assmann, *Moses* (see n. 50), 10.
79 J. Assmann, *Cultural Memory* (see n. 48), 62, 144 n. 1.
80 J. Assmann, *Cultural Memory* (see n. 48), 27.
81 Inter alia, see B. Schwartz, "Postmodernity and Historical Reputation: Abraham Lincoln in Late Twentieth-Century American Memory," *Social Forces* 77.1 (1998), 63–103, here 66–69, 93–95; id., "Social Change and Collective Memory: The Democratization of George Washington," *ASR* 56 (1991), 221–236, here 221–222, 233–234; id., "The Social Context of Commemoration," *Social Forces* 61.2 (1982), 374–402, here 375–377, 396; T. Zhang and B. Schwartz, "Confucius and the Cultural Revolution: A Study in Collective Memory," *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society* 11.2 (1997), 189–212, here 189–191, 208.

gy."[82] As the leading voice of the continuity perspective on collective memory, Schwartz has advocated in any number of publications that, although the past is malleable, its malleability knows limits. Although he often sounds like Halbwachs,[83] Schwartz argues consistently that Halbwachs's and presentists' emphasis on the all-powerful present presents "a one-sided perspective."[84] For Schwartz,

> To conceive of memory as a mirror of reality is to conceive a fiction, for if, independently of historical evidence, our changing understanding of the past uniquely parallels changes in our society, then the only relevant reality would be the present, and the very concept of collective memory would be meaningless. [...] To conceive the meaning of the past as fixed and steady is likewise meaningless, since any event must appear differently as perceptual circumstances change.[85]

Importantly, then, Schwartz's position is not the opposite of the presentist position (which would be historical positivism) but a modification of it that accounts for the fact that, in Michael Schudson's words, "The past is in some respects, and under some conditions, highly resistant to efforts to make it over."[86] Schwartz thus consistently steers a middle course in insisting on continuity between the past and the present: "In most cases [...] we find the past to be neither totally precarious nor immutable, but a stable image upon which new elements are intermittently superimposed."[87] In traditional cultures, the role of the past can be even stronger, and, along with Tong Zhang, Schwartz introduces into memory discourse the concept of "critical inheritance." This concept explains how some cultures acknowledge both negative and positive aspects of the past while selectively emphasizing those aspects that are most relevant to current identity.[88] As yet, it has made virtually no impact on Gospels studies, but could be a useful heuristic device.

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82 Olick, Vinitzky-Seroussi, and Levy, *Collective Memory Reader* (see n. 20), 242.
83 Schwartz, "Social Context" (see n. 81): "Recollection of the past is an active, constructive process, not a simple matter of retrieving information. To remember is to place a part of the past in the service of conceptions and needs of the present" (374); "While the object of commemoration is usually to be found in the past, the issue which motivates its selection and shaping is always to be found among the concerns of the present" (395).
84 Schwartz, "Social Change" (see n. 81), 222.
85 B. Schwartz, *Abraham Lincoln and the Forge of National Memory* (Chicago, 2000), 7.
86 M. Schudson, "The Present in the Past versus the Past in the Present," *Communication* 11 (1989), 105–113, here 107.
87 Schwartz, *Abraham Lincoln* (see n. 85), 125.
88 Zhang and Schwartz, "Confucius" (see n. 81), 194: "Critical inheritance upholds traditional authority because it sustains the dignity of the past while recognizing the need of successive generations to reevaluate it."

Schwartz is by no means alone in asserting a role for the past in the formation of memory,[89] but his work has been the most sustained effort to address the deficiency of the past in social memory scholarship. Curiously, Foster refers to the continuity perspective of Schwartz as "less popular" and presentism as "dominant."[90] He offers no explanation or source for these judgments, which do not reflect the most recent assessments inside and outside Biblical Studies.[91]

Schwartz's relevance for New Testament studies is great, as is indicated by the publication of a Semeia volume dedicated to his work featuring New Testament (and other) scholars.[92] Furthermore, Schwartz has worked to become intimately familiar with New Testament scholarship. He presented papers at the annual meetings of the Society of Biblical Literature in 2003 and 2010, as well as the 2012 Jesus Conference in Dayton, Ohio. Schwartz has also published several contributions to New Testament scholarship.[93] I highlight two aspects of his work: the actual past; contributions to Gospels studies.

3.1. The Continuity Perspective and the Actual Past

First, and most important, consistent with the continuity perspective and contrary to the perspective of Halbwachs, Schwartz reserves a role for the past in his theory of collective memory. One must be careful here, however. As was the case with Assmann also, the idea that the past pressures the present does not lead directly to the further idea that this pressure comes from the actual past. "Stable images of the past are not always de-

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89 P. Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (Cambridge, 1989), 122; J. Fentress and C. Wickham, *Social Memory* (Oxford, 1992), 24; E. Shils, *Tradition* (Chicago, 1981), 35, 39. In particular, see Schudson, "Present" (see n. 86), 105–113.

90 Foster, "Memory" (see n. 12), 196, 226.

91 Ben-Yehuda, *Masada Myth* (see n. 42), 23–24; Coser, introduction (see n. 5), 28–34; I.A. Henderson, "Memory, Text and Performance in Early Christian Formation," in *Religion und Bildung: Medien und Funktionen religiösen Wissens in der Kaiserzeit* (ed. C. Frateantonio and H. Krasser; Stuttgart, 2010), 157–184, here 167; Kirk, "Social and Cultural Memory" (see n. 21), 12–17. See also B.L. White, *Remembering Paul: Ancient and Modern Contests over the Image of the Apostle* (New York, 2014), 17, 97–102, 132–134, 177.

92 T. Thatcher (ed.), *Memory and Identity in Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity: A Conversation with Barry Schwartz* (SemeiaSt 78; Atlanta, 2014).

93 B. Schwartz, "Christian Origins: Historical Truth and Social Memory," in *Memory, Tradition, and Text* (see n. 6), 43–56; id., "What Difference Does the Medium Make?" in *The Fourth Gospel in First-Century Media Culture* (ed. A. Le Donne and T. Thatcher; LNTS 426; London, 2011), 225–238; id., "Where There's Smoke, There's Fire: Memory and History," in *Memory and Identity* (see n. 92), 7–37.

monstrably true images. Sometimes false ideas are transferred across generations and accepted as if they were true."[94] The impact of the past in the first instance simply refers to the inertia of past interpretation upon present conception. On the other hand, for Schwartz, the actual past remains one possible source for the inertia of the past among others. "Sometimes individuals experience something they cannot forget."[95] That is, sometimes "what really happened" leads to, or at least restrains, present conception of the past. In a statement that redefines Halbwachs's collective memory in light of this emphasis, he says: "Collective memory is based on two sources of belief about the past – *history* and *commemoration*."[96] In this context, by "history" Schwartz means the actual past. Along these lines, Schwartz elsewhere, in reference to Abraham Lincoln, distinguishes between the "historical Lincoln" and his "changing image" over time, a distinction known all too well to historical Jesus scholars.[97]

Such renewed interest in the past among the continuity perspective of collective memory owes as much to its critical reception of Halbwachs as it does to simultaneous developments in historiography, as noted above with Assmann.[98] Whereas the modernist perspective assumes that there is an objective past reality for historians to attain or reconstruct, more recent approaches have insisted that the past survives only in the interpretations of it that persist. For those scholars who assume the possibility of a connecting link between the actual past and its representations in memory, then, questioning why certain events were remembered in the precise manners they were can, in some (but not all) instances, lead to informed guesses about the actual past. Thus, Schwartz says, "Sharp opposition between history and collective memory has been our Achilles Heel, causing us to assert unwillingly, and often despite ourselves, that what is not historical must be 'invented' or 'constructed' – which transforms collective memory into a kind of cynical muckracking."[99] In preserving a role for the past in the formation of memory in the present, Schwartz and others affirming the continuity perspective point to a much more complex phenomenon for collective memory than do Halbwachs and presentists.

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94 Zhang and Schwartz, "Confucius" (see n. 81), 190.
95 Schwartz, "Where There's Smoke" (see n. 93), 7.
96 Schwartz, *Abraham Lincoln* (see n. 85), 9 (emphasis original).
97 B. Schwartz, *Abraham Lincoln in the Post-Heroic Era: History and Memory in Late Twentieth-Century America* (Chicago, 2009), 14.
98 Similarly, see Olick, Vinitzky-Seroussi, and Levy, introduction (see n. 40), 43–45.
99 Barry Schwartz, personal correspondence recorded in Olick and Robbins, "Social Memory Studies" (see n. 40), 111.

3.2. Contributions to Gospels Studies

Second, and related to the previous point, Schwartz has often been highly critical of some quarters of New Testament scholarship where a presentist perspective reigns.[100] Nevertheless, his critique has not amounted to assuming that something did happen because the Gospels claim that it did. Rather, for Schwartz, scholars should first and foremost seek to understand the Gospels as the products of the past/present interaction for early Christians (what Assmann calls communicative memory) and not immediately force upon the tradition a cynical modern perspective.[101] He thus asks, "Can such skeptics [...] grasp the social memory of first-century believers?" and answers: "Bultmann's and Halbwachs's common failure is their refusal even to ask how pericopae, texts, and physical sites reflected what ordinary people of the first century believed."[102] I reiterate once more that Schwartz's point is simply that dismissing out of hand the possible impact of the past – whether that is a historically inaccurate past or historically accurate past – is poor historical method.

Schwartz thus joins the ranks of Halbwachs and Assmann as foundational social memory theorists who have applied social memory theory to the New Testament and related fields. He explicitly addresses the Gospels in this regard:

The job of social memory scholarship is to assess what we know: assembling documents like the Gospels, estimating their meanings and relations to the culture of which their authors were a part, and drawing conclusions. From the social memory standpoint, then, our object of study is not the authenticity of the Gospels; it is rather the Gospels as sources of information about the popular beliefs of early Christianity.[103]

Therefore, although Schwartz is careful to preserve a role for the past in the formation of group memory, his general assessment of the goal of social memory enquiry affirms what Assmann also said. In the first instance, it is not about discovering the actual past but understanding why the tradition developed in the manners that it did.

100 Schwartz, "Christian Origins" (see n. 93), 43–56; id., "Where There's Smoke" (see n. 93), 7–37. Consider, e. g., Schwartz's critique of Bruce Malina in "Christian Origins," 51: "Malina's torturous logic would not be worth mentioning were it not so typically distracting."
101 Schwartz, "Christian Origins" (see n. 93), 45–50.
102 Schwartz, "Christian Origins" (see n. 93), 43, 49, respectively. Cf. also Price, "Memory" (see n. 19), 16.
103 Schwartz, "Christian Origins" (see n. 93), 50.

4. Summary

Before moving on to Part Two, where I assess recent applications of social memory theory in Gospels studies, a few summarizing points are necessary. First, that social memory discourse is relevant for, and applicable to, New Testament studies is beyond question. In addition to the fact that the aforementioned major figures discuss the traditions of ancient Israel or early Christianity, one could also cite studies of Jewish history from a social memory perspective outside Biblical Studies.[104] The Bible and its worlds form a cornerstone of the discourse regardless of whether biblical specialists contribute to it. Beyond this fact, and although I have not discussed it in depth, it should be clear to readers that social memory theory, in all its various incarnations, is intricately related to identity construction. In the words of Olick and Robbins, "Memory is a central, if not the central, medium through which identities are constituted."[105] This point only further indicates the relevance of social memory theory for New Testament scholars as they assess writings and practices in early Christianity that are in the midst of identity construction, maintenance, and articulation.

Second is the issue of jargon. As should be clear, "social memory," "collective memory," and "cultural memory" do not technically refer to the same phenomena. Add to these terms further nuanced jargon such as "autobiographical memory," "individual memory," "historical memory," "communicative memory" and a host of others not named here but appearing in the literature ("hot memory," "cold memory," "normative memory," "formative memory," "counter-memory," "connective memory," "cognitive memory," "inscribed memory," "embodied memory," etc.) and one has a recipe for serious confusion.[106] Some degree of synonymy is inevitable, however; not only because scholars tend to use "social memory" for the entire field, but also because, as Hübenthal notes, the distinc-

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104 Ben-Yehuda, *Masada Myth* (see n. 42); B. Schwartz, Y. Zerubavel, and B.M. Barnett, "The Recovery of Masada: A Study in Collective Memory," *The Sociological Quarterly* 27.2 (1986), 147–164; Y. Yerushalmi, *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory* (New York, 1989); Y. Zerubavel, *Recovered Roots: Collective Memory and the Making of Israeli National Tradition* (Chicago, 1995).

105 Olick and Robbins, "Social Memory Studies" (see n. 40), 133.

106 It gets even more confusing. As Hübenthal notes, the same terms also do not necessarily mean the same in different languages: "*Social Memory* is not the same as *Soziales Gedächtnis* and *Cultural Memory* does not equal *Kulturelles Gedächtnis*" (Hübenthal, "Social and Cultural Memory" [see n. 29], 193).

tions between them are possible only at a theoretical level.[107] A personal diary may be an example of social memory while a family chronicle is an example of collective memory,[108] but at what precise chronological moment do the types of reflections informing a personal diary become the types of reflections informing a family chronicle? Nevertheless, at the theoretical level, as well as the practical level of social recognition and function, the terms refer to different phenomena. When one uses these terms, one must make every effort to be specific about their referents.

Third, although the relationship between the actual past and commemoration of the past ("history" and "memory" respectively under their historical-positivist conceptions) is important to each of these scholars, it is important in varying ways. The actual past is important to Halbwachs as the antithesis of collective memory. Assmann sees cultural memory and mnemohistory as related to but distinct from interest in historical truth. Schwartz displays the most affinity for seeing historical interests as adjacent to collective memory. Using Pierre Nora, the "true heir of Halbwachs,"[109] as the mouthpiece for Halbwachs, the following quotations reveal differing understandings of the relationship between "history" and "memory" in these scholars' works:

"Memory and history, far from being synonymous, are thus in many respects opposed." (Nora)[110] – "Mnemohistory is not the opposite of history, but rather is one of its branches." (Assmann)[111] – "Collective memory is based on two sources of belief about the past – *history* and *commemoration.*" (Schwartz)[112]

In light of these differences, what these scholars hold in common is worth underscoring. All are agreed that social approaches to memory are *primarily* interested in the development of the tradition, not the historical accuracy of social memory. When and where social memory theory is interested in the actual past (the continuity perspective), it is interested insofar as

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107 Hübenthal, "Social and Cultural Memory" (see n. 29), 195, 202, 207. Cf. also E. van Eck, "Social Memory and Identity: Luke 19:12b–24 and 27," *BTB* 41.4 (2011), 201–212, here 202.

108 Example is from Hübenthal, "Social and Cultural Memory" (see n. 29), 197.

109 Olick and Robbins, "Social Memory Studies" (see n. 40), 121.

110 P. Nora, "General Introduction: Between Memory and History," in *Realms of Memory* (ed. L.D. Kritzman with P. Nora; trans. A. Goldhammer; 3 vols.; New York, 1996), 1.1–20, here 3.

111 J. Assmann, *Moses* (see n. 50), 9.

112 Schwartz, *Abraham Lincoln* (see n. 85), 9 (emphasis original). Likewise, "History texts and commemorative objects, no less than accounts of the movement of light particles, are at least partly dependent on the reality they represent" (Schwartz, "Where There's Smoke" [see n. 93], 22).

the past could have contributed to the development of social frameworks that enable the formation of memory in the present. Equally important, then, is that, although social memory theory is not *primarily* interested in enquiries into historical truth, it is not irrelevant for such enquiries either. One might say instead that social memory theory is the first "port of call." Historians must reckon first with the complex relationship between the past and present in any commemorative activity. Asking further questions about the possibilities of the actual past's contribution is a separate and subsequent stage of investigating those complexities. In this sense, *social memory theory is not so much a historiographical method as it is a theory of the social construction of the past that enables responsible historiography.*

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Social Memory Theory and Gospels Research: The First Decade (Part Two)[1]

The good news is that social memory theory has finally found its way into Biblical Stud-
ies. The bad news is that it is often unclear [...] what social memory theory really is about.
(Sandra Hübenthal)[2]

Es gibt keine Historie jenseits des Textes. Aber es gibt Historie durch den Text und als
Text. (Ruben Zimmermann)[3]

In der neutestamentlichen Wissenschaft des englischen Sprachbereichs liegt seit
2005 eine grundlegende Einführung in die *social memory theory* vor. Seitdem hat
die neue Forschungsrichtung ebenso rasch Befürworter wie Gegner gefunden.
Viele Schlüsselfragen der neutestamentlichen Exegese werden inzwischen unter
der Perspektive des sogenannten *„memory approach"* diskutiert. Dieser zweiteilige
Beitrag befasst sich mit dem *status quaestionis* nach den ersten zehn Jahren *social
memory research* in der Evangelienforschung. Der zweite Teil behandelt Anwendun-
gen der *social memory theory* in der Evangelienforschung auf vier zusammenhängen-
den Feldern: der Frage der Überlieferung mündlicher Evangelientradition, der Echt-
heitskriterien, der *new historiography* und der historischen Zuverlässigkeit der Evan-
gelien.

Keywords: social memory theory, historical Jesus, memory approach, new
historiography

The impact of social memory theory on Gospels research has masked a
stunningly diverse appropriation of the method in New Testament schol-
arship and its related fields more broadly. Scholars have applied social

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1 Part One was published in *EC* 6.3 (2015), 354–376.
2 S. Hübenthal, "Social and Cultural Memory in Biblical Exegesis: The Quest for an Ad-
   equate Application," in *Cultural Memory in Biblical Exegesis* (ed. P. Carstens, T.B. Has-
   selbalch, and N.P. Lemche; PHSC 17; Piscataway, N.J., 2012), 191–216, here 191.
3 R. Zimmermann, "Geschichtstheorien und Neues Testament: Gedächtnis, Diskurs, Kul-
   tur und Narration in der historiographischen Diskussion," *EC* 2 (2011), 417–444, here
   440.

memory theory to topics such as Paul and Pauline literature,[4] Peter,[5] the epistle to the Hebrews,[6] the Dead Sea Scrolls,[7] the Gospel of Thomas,[8] the Gospel of Peter,[9] the Didache[10] and Apostolic Fathers,[11] Melito of Sardis,[12] the tomb of James, the brother of Jesus,[13] Trajan's Column,[14] later Christian/pagan conflict,[15] and Egyptian magical papyri.[16] Nevertheless, it is undeniable that social memory theory's most demonstrable inroads into New Testament scholarship reside in Jesus studies. Sandra Hübenthal goes so far as to claim, "The only area in biblical research where social memory theory has gained reasonable currency is historical Jesus research and

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4 S.C. Barton, "Memory and Remembrance in Paul," in *Memory in the Bible and Antiquity* (ed. L. Stuckenbruck, S.C. Barton, and B.G. Wold; WUNT 212; Tübingen, 2007), 321–339; P.F. Esler, *Conflict and Identity in Romans: The Social Setting of Paul's Letter* (Minneapolis, 2003), 24, 174–178; id., "Paul's Contestation of Israel's (Ethnic) Memory of Abraham in Galatians 3," *BTB* 36 (2006), 23–34; G.M. Keightley, "Christian Collective Memory and Paul's Knowledge of Jesus," in *Memory, Tradition, and Text: Uses of the Past in Early Christianity* (ed. A. Kirk and T. Thatcher; SemeiaSt 52; Atlanta, 2005), 129–150; ead., "The Church's Memory of Jesus: A Social Science Analysis of 1 Thessalonians," *BTB* 17 (1987), 149–156, here 150–156; B.L. White, *Remembering Paul: Ancient and Modern Contests over the Image of the Apostle* (New York, 2014), 91–102.

5 M. Bockmuehl, *The Remembered Peter: Peter in Ancient Reception and Modern Debate* (WUNT 262; Tübingen, 2010), 17–30.

6 P.F. Esler, "Collective Memory and Hebrews 11: Outlining a New Investigative Framework," in Kirk and Thatcher, *Memory, Tradition, and Text* (see n. 4), 151–171.

7 L.T. Stuckenbruck, "The Teacher of Righteousness Remembered: From Fragmentary Sources to Collective Memory in the Dead Sea Scrolls," in Stuckenbruck, Barton, and Wold, *Memory* (see n. 4), 75–94.

8 A.D. DeConick, "Reading the *Gospel of Thomas* as a Repository of Early Christian Communal Memory," in Kirk and Thatcher, *Memory, Tradition, and Text* (see n. 4), 207–220.

9 A. Kirk, "The Johannine Jesus in the Gospel of Peter: A Social Memory Approach," in *Jesus in Johannine Tradition* (ed. R.T. Fortna and T. Thatcher; Louisville, Ky., 2001), 313–321.

10 R.H. Williams, "Social Memory and the *Didaché*," *BTB* 36.1 (2006), 35–45.

11 S.E. Young, *Jesus Tradition in the Apostolic Fathers: Their Explicit Appeals to the Words of Jesus in Light of Orality Studies* (WUNT 2/311; Tübingen, 2011), 93–96.

12 I.H. Henderson, "Memory, Text and Performance in Early Christian Formation," in *Religion und Bildung: Medien und Funktionen religiösen Wissens in der Kaiserzeit* (ed. C. Frateantonio and H. Krasser; Stuttgart, 2010), 168–181.

13 Y.Z. Eliav, "The Tomb of James, Brother of Jesus, as *Locus Memoriae*," *HTR* 97.1 (2004), 33–59.

14 A.J. Dewey, "The Gospel of Trajan," in *Jesus, the Voice, and the Text: Beyond The Oral and the Written Gospel* (ed. T. Thatcher; Waco, Tex., 2008), 181–196; cf. his earlier "The Locus for Death: Social Memory and the Passion Narratives," in Kirk and Thatcher, *Memory, Tradition, and Text* (see n. 4), 119–128, here 123–126.

15 S. Price, "Memory and Ancient Greece," in *Historical and Religious Memory in the Ancient World* (ed. B. Dignas and R.R.R. Smith; Oxford, 2012), 15–36, here 29–30.

16 R. Gordon, "Memory and Authority in the Magical Papyri," in Dignas and Smith, *Historical and Religious Memory* (see n. 15), 145–180, here 153, 163.

even there it is treated highly critically and discussed extremely controversially."[17] Furthering this discussion, I will here address four specific issues in Gospels studies that relate to the relationship between the past and the present in the formation of the Gospels: the transmission of the oral Jesus tradition; criteria of authenticity; the new historiography; and the historical reliability of the Jesus tradition. I argue that, although social memory theory has often been misrepresented and misapplied, it plays a central role in a new stage of Gospels research.

1. The Transmission of the Oral Gospel Tradition and Form Criticism

Although not receiving the kind of attention that social memory theory has received in historical Jesus studies, the most matured area of application of social memory theory in Gospels research concerns the transmission of the oral Jesus tradition. Led by Holly Hearon, Richard Horsley, Werner Kelber, Alan Kirk, and Tom Thatcher, many scholars have found social memory theory's descriptions of the dynamic relationship between the present and the past a useful framework for conceptualizing the transmission of the oral Jesus tradition.[18] Rafael Rodríguez has written a full monograph on the topic and Eric Eve has also employed the memory approach in his overview of the scholarly discussion.[19] Since the formation and transmission of the oral Jesus tradition was the focus of form criticism, it is little surprise that many applications of social memory theory in this area have engaged form criticism and its lingering effects in Gospels scholarship.

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17 Hübenthal, "Social and Cultural Memory" (see n. 2), 192. Cf. also M.J. Thate, *Remembrance of Things Past? Albert Schweitzer, the Anxiety of Influence, and the Untidy Jesus of Markan Memory* (WUNT 2/351; Tübingen, 2013).

18 See in particular the contributions to R.A. Horsley, J.A. Draper, J.M. Foley (eds.), *Performing the Gospel: Orality, Memory, and Mark* (Minneapolis, 2006); W.H. Kelber and S. Byrskog (eds.), *Jesus in Memory: Traditions in Oral and Scribal Perspectives* (Waco, Tex., 2009); Kirk and Thatcher, *Memory, Tradition, and Text* (see n. 4); Thatcher, *Jesus* (see n. 14); A. Weissenrieder and R.B. Coote (eds.), *The Interface of Orality and Writing: Speaking, Seeing, Writing in the Shaping of New Genres* (WUNT 260; Tübingen, 2010).

19 R. Rodríguez, *Structuring Early Christian Memory: Jesus in Tradition, Performance and Text* (LNTS 407; London, 2010), 3–80; E. Eve, *Behind the Gospels: Understanding the Oral Tradition* (London, 2013), 86–134, respectively.

1.1. Critiques of Form Criticism

Many assessments of form criticism in this regard have been critical. In light of its near total emphasis upon the *Sitz im Leben der Kirche* (whether Hellenistic or Palestinian) over the *Sitz im Leben Jesu*, Gospels scholars as well as social memory theorists outside Biblical Studies have identified form criticism as a thoroughly presentist perspective.[20] Although he was merely repeating the earlier opinion of Rudolf Bultmann, Paul Winter's assessment of the controversy narratives serves as a clear example of this presentist tendency: "All the Marcan 'controversy stories', without exception, reflect disputes between the 'Apostolic Church' and its social environment, and are devoid of roots in the circumstances of the life of Jesus."[21]

From the continuity perspective of social memory theory, the failure to consider seriously the ways in which the past could have contributed to early Christians' presents is a severe oversight; for the early Christian communities were not theologizing castles in the sky detached entirely from pasts that led to their presents. As Part One of this article showed, social memory scholars in the humanities more broadly have decried the presentist approach in their own field. Previous typologies provide categories for the present, and thus structure or restrain the interpretive freedom of the present to an extent as groups assimilate the *novum* to the known. In some instances, such as the scripted violence of a crucifixion, the past presses itself more forcibly upon the present, even while the present scrambles to find typological frames with which to master the shattering of group identity.[22] The past does not always pressure the present in this

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20 C. Keith, "Memory and Authenticity: Jesus Tradition and What Really Happened," *ZNW* 102 (2011), 155–177, here 170; id., *Jesus' Literacy: Scribal Culture and the Teacher from Galilee* (LNTS 413; London, 2011), 62; A. Kirk and T. Thatcher, "Jesus Tradition as Social Memory," in id., *Memory, Tradition, and Text* (see n. 4), 25–42, here 29–31; B. Schwartz, "Christian Origins: Historical Truth and Social Memory," ibid., 43–56, here 47–50.

21 P. Winter, *On the Trial of Jesus* (rev. and ed. T.A. Burkill and G. Vermes; 2nd ed.; SJ 1; Berlin, 1974), 175. Bultmann had earlier said, "Controversy dialogues are all of them imaginary scenes" (*The History of the Synoptic Tradition* [trans. John Marsh; rev. ed.; Peabody, Mass. 1963], 40; cf. also 41, 54). Consider also the assessment of John's Gospel in E. Käsemann, "The Problem of the Historical Jesus," in *Essays on New Testament Themes* (trans. W.J. Montague; SBT 41; London, 1964), 32; trans. and repr. from *ZTK* 51 (1954), 125–153. I argue against the overly skeptical perspective of Winter and Bultmann on the controversy narratives in C. Keith, *Jesus against the Scribal Elite: The Origins of the Conflict* (Grand Rapids, Mich., 2014).

22 C. Keith and T. Thatcher, "The Scar of the Cross: The Violence Ratio and the Earliest Memories of Jesus," in Thatcher, *Jesus* (see n. 14), 197–214; A. Kirk, "The Memory of

manner, but examples such as this point to a much more complex inter-action between the present and the past than form criticism's unidirec-tional theory of the transmission of the oral gospel tradition can accom-modate.[23]

Another area in which scholars have been critical of form criticism is its treatment of the shift between oral and written tradition. Although this shift served as the crucial threshold between early Palestinian Christianity and later Hellenistic Christianity, Bultmann famously regarded the tran-sition as "nothing in principle new, but only complet[ing] what was begun in the oral tradition."[24] In 1983, Werner Kelber persuasively argued on the basis of the dynamics of oral tradition that the textualization of Mark's Gospel was not a logical, evolutionary, or organic process, as Bultmann and others imagined.[25] Rather, and as Graham Stanton had also earlier ob-served,[26] it is a significant alteration to the Jesus tradition that requires ex-planation.

Jan Assmann's concept of the *Traditionsbruch* of textuality adds con-siderable weight to Kelber's and Stanton's contention. The textualization of tradition is a reconstitution of the identity-marking efforts of the tra-dition that occurs at the crosshairs of communicative memory and cultur-al memory. It is thus an important step on the path toward canonization. Kelber has adopted Assmann's *Traditionsbruch* model in reiterating his arguments about the textualization of Mark's Gospel.[27] Kirk and Joanna Dewey, too, have argued for approaching the textualization of Mark's Gos-pel in light of the *Traditionsbruch*.[28] In dialogue with these studies, I have

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Violence and the Death of Jesus in Q," in Kirk and Thatcher, *Memory, Tradition, and Text* (see n. 4), 191–206, here 206.

23 Form criticism's theory of gospel transmission is unidirectional in more than one sense. See further S.-I. Lee, *Jesus and Gospel Traditions in Bilingual Context: A Study in the Interdirectionality of Language* (BZNW 186; Berlin, 2012), 1–73.

24 Bultmann, *History* (see n. 21), 20; cf. also 163, 331.

25 W.H. Kelber, *The Oral and the Written Gospel: The Hermeneutics of Speaking and Writ-ing in the Synoptic Tradition, Mark, Paul, and Q* (Bloomington, Ind., 1983), esp. 1–43.

26 G. Stanton, "Form Criticism Revisited," in *What about the New Testament? Essays in Honour of Christopher Evans* (ed. M. Hooker and C. Hickling; London, 1975), 13–27, here 15–18.

27 W.H. Kelber, "The Works of Memory: Christian Origins as MnemoHistory: A Re-sponse," in Kirk and Thatcher, *Memory, Tradition, and Text* (see n. 4), 221–248, here 228–229, 243–247.

28 A. Kirk, "Memory Theory and Jesus Research," in *Handbook for the Study of the His-torical Jesus* (ed. S.E. Porter and T. Holmén; 4 vols.; Leiden, 2010), 1.809–842, here 813, 839–842; J. Dewey, "The Gospel of Mark as Oral Hermeneutic," in Thatcher, *Jesus* (see n. 14), 71–87, here 72–73. Cf. also A Kirk, "Memory, Scribal Media, and the Synoptic Problem," in *New Studies in the Synoptic Problem* (ed. P. Foster et al.;

argued for placing the conceptual emphasis on the *zerdehnte Situation* of textuality, which underlies the *Traditionsbruch*, thereby also drawing upon Assmann.[29] In this context, I have noted another problem with form criticism's treatment of the oral-to-written transition. For the form critics (and Kelber as well, though in a different way), the respective media forms carried differing Christologies. In light of Assmann's concept of the extended situation, however, this assumption is in need of demonstration. Written narratives can also have a hardening effect on the identity-construction processes of oral tradition, resulting in an essential ideological continuity between the differing forms of media.[30]

Applications of memory theory to early Christian media transitions have not focused singly on the Gospel of Mark, however. In his and Kirk's seminal 2005 Semeia volume on social memory theory, Thatcher addressed the Gospel of John's transition from oral to written tradition.[31] Thatcher observes that the Johannine author's concept of Spirit-enabled memory of Jesus that leads into all truth (esp. John 14:26; 16:13) runs against the common scholarly concept that a Christian moved Johannine gospel tradition into book-form in order to meet an archival need.[32] Thatcher therefore suggests that John's Gospel was textualized in order to draw upon the rhetorical value of texts as material artifacts in order

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BETL 239; Leuven, 2011), 459–482, here 460–466. Cf. also J. Schröter, *Erinnerung an Jesu Worte: Studien zur Rezeption der Logienüberlieferung in Markus, Q und Thomas* (WMANT 76; Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1997), 464–465, in dialogue with Assmann and Kelber.

29 C. Keith, "Prolegomena on the Textualization of Mark's Gospel: Manuscript Culture, the Extended Situation, and the Emergence of the Written Gospel," in *Memory and Identity in Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity: A Conversation with Barry Schwartz* (ed. T. Thatcher; SemeiaSt 78; Atlanta, 2014), 159–184.

30 Keith, "Prolegomena" (see n. 29), 175–176; also id., "A Performance of the Text: The Adulteress's Entrance into John's Gospel," in *The Fourth Gospel in First-Century Media Culture* (ed. A. Le Donne and T. Thatcher; LNTS 426; London, 2011), 49–69, here 65–69.

31 T. Thatcher, "Why John Wrote a Gospel: Memory and History in an Early Christian Community," in Kirk and Thatcher, *Memory, Tradition, and Text* (see n. 4), 79–97. Foster's citation of this lone study as one of "a few fleeting attempts to apply the hypothesis of social memory to early Christian texts" ("Memory, Orality, and the Fourth Gospel: Three Dead-Ends in Historical Jesus Research," *JSHJ* 10 [2012], 191–227, here 199) is odd since the study occurs in a volume of essays that apply social memory theory to early Christian texts. Even odder is his conclusion: "While Thatcher's reading may be legitimate, it has no implications for historical Jesus research and it brings scholars no closer to the events in the life of Jesus of Nazareth." Thatcher never postures his study as addressing the historical Jesus; rather, it addresses, as the title clearly indicates, the textualization of Johannine oral tradition.

32 Thatcher, "Why John Wrote a Gospel" (see n. 31), 85.

to seal a particular Christology – "a move that would at once preserve his unique vision of Jesus, freeze that vision in a perpetually nonnegotiable medium, and assert the special authority of that vision against competing perspectives."[33] Thatcher subsequently developed these ideas more fully in his book *Why John Wrote a Gospel*, where he illuminates especially the significance of John's textuality in a predominantly illiterate Christian community.[34]

Finally, form criticism's division of the gospel tradition into traditions that reflect the past (*Sitz im Leben Jesu* or earliest Palestinian Christianity) or the present (*Sitz im Leben der Kirche*), stands in direct opposition to Maurice Halbwachs's and others' insights concerning memory formation.[35] If all memory is constructed from the perspective of the present, there is no "tradition" or "memory" that can be extricated from those present social frameworks. From this perspective, the concomitant form-critical notion that one could sift through the layers of the Jesus tradition in order to excavate earlier tradition from later ecclesiastical accretions is thoroughly misguided. I will return to this issue shortly in discussing the criteria of authenticity.

1.2. Affirmations of Form Criticism

In light of these critical assessments of form criticism, one could easily get the impression that scholars employing the memory approach have been only critical of form criticism. Paul Foster has recently argued in this direction by mentioning only criticisms of form criticism from memory theorists and charging that such scholars seem unaware of the fact that their insights coincide with certain aspects of form criticism.[36] Foster is incorrect. Scholars have also used social memory theory in order to underscore form criticism's lasting contributions and build upon them. One obvious affirmation of form criticism by social memory theory is the pivotal role that form criticism assigned to the present *Sitz im Leben* of the transmitters of the gospel tradition.[37] Although they were wrong to neglect the formative role of the past, the form critics' perspective on the significance of the

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33 Thatcher, "Why John Wrote a Gospel" (see n. 31), 94.

34 T. Thatcher, *Why John Wrote a Gospel: Jesus – Memory – History* (Louisville, Ky., 2006).

35 Foster, "Memory" (see n. 31), 197, overlooks this issue.

36 Foster, "Memory" (see n. 31), 197, 198, 202, 226–227.

37 C. Keith, "The Indebtedness of the Criteria Approach to Form Criticism and Recent Attempts to Rehabilitate the Search for an Authentic Jesus," in *Jesus, Criteria, and the Demise of Authenticity* (ed. C. Keith and A. Le Donne; London, 2012), 25–48, here 37.

present for the formation of memory is in agreement with Halbwachs. I have thus elsewhere explicitly stated that social memory theory both affirms and critiques aspects of form criticism: "The Jesus-memory approach affirms the best aspect of form criticism and the criteria approach (recognition of early Christian interpretive activity) and addresses their worst aspect (exclusion of the impact of Jesus upon the interpretations of him)."[38] Anthony Le Donne similarly simultaneously critiques and affirms Bultmann's hermeneutics in an application of social memory theory.[39]

In addition to such statements, scholars have affirmed, augmented, or rehabilitated specific aspects of form criticism from a memory perspective. Samuel Byrskog has forwarded a rehabilitated concept of form criticism's *Sitz im Leben* in light of social memory theory: "Generally speaking, the typical features of the *Sitz im Leben* have to do with the social dynamics of mnemonically relating to the past in the present, which can be studied and differentiated with reference to theories of social and collective memory."[40] Byrskog thus describes these *Sitze* as social settings with a "basic orientation towards the mnemonic past."[41] Rather than discard the presentist version of this aspect of form criticism, therefore, Byrskog has incorporated it into a memory-based approach that is equally concerned with the role of the past in the communities.

Byrskog has also incorporated form criticism's focus upon particular forms into a memory-based approach, viewing *chreia* as mnemonic narrative devices.[42] Ruben Zimmermann, too, has stressed the necessary role of particular forms in traditioning processes from a memory perspective. In several publications he focuses upon parables and argues "that short

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38 Keith, "Memory" (see n. 20), 177; id., *Jesus' Literacy* (see n. 20), 69.

39 A. Le Donne, *The Historiographical Jesus: Memory, Typology, and the Son of David* (Waco, Tex., 2009), 38.

40 S. Byrskog, "A Century with the *Sitz im Leben*: From Form-Critical Setting to Gospel Community and Beyond," *ZNW* 98 (2007), 1–27, here 22. See further id., "Memory and Identity in the Gospels: A New Perspective," in *Exploring Early Christian Identity* (ed. B. Holmberg; WUNT 226; Tübingen, 2008), 33–57, here 40–44; id., "A New Quest for the *Sitz im Leben*: Social Memory, the Jesus Tradition and the Gospel of Matthew," *NTS* 52 (2006), 319–336.

41 Byrskog, "Century" (see n. 40), 22. Similarly, F. Watson, *Gospel Writing: A Canonical Perspective* (Grand Rapids, Mich., 2013), 346: "The life of the earliest communities is permeated by the remembered life of Jesus."

42 Byrskog, "Century" (see n. 40), 26; id., "The Early Church as a Narrative Fellowship: An Exploratory Study of the Performance of the *Chreia*," *TTKi* 78.3–4 (2007), 207–226; id., "Memory" (see n. 40), 44–55; id., "New Quest" (see n. 40), 325–326.

forms acted as the media of a primarily oral memory culture."[43] He comments directly on Le Donne's appropriation of memory theory from this perspective, concluding, "Das frühe Christentum hat demnach in der Ausbildung und Benutzung von typischen Textformen (z.B. Typologie, Parabel) den Prozess der Jesuserinnerung strukturiert."[44] Kirk has recently further affirmed these arguments, noting that the memory approach takes over prominent aspects of form criticism.[45]

These appropriations of social memory theory stand generally in the line of Assmann's cultural memory theory, which moved Halbwachs's original insights more intentionally into the realm of ancient media. Furthermore, they demonstrate that New Testament scholars who have appropriated social memory theory have been neither oblivious to its similarities to form criticism nor solely negative of form criticism.

2. The Criteria of Authenticity

The relationship between social memory theory and form criticism also stands at the crux of another important issue in recent Gospels studies – the criteria of authenticity. The criteria of authenticity are no strangers to criticism.[46] Scholars approaching them from the perspective of social memory theory have heightened that criticism by focusing particularly on the problematic assumption that lies at their very core; namely, that scholars can separate "authentic" Jesus tradition from "inauthentic" Jesus tradition. As is clear in the writings of Ernst Käsemann and others, the criteria approach inherited directly from form criticism the assumption that scholars can separate the Gospel tradition into two piles, one of which reflects the past of Jesus (*Sitz im Leben Jesu*) and one of which re-

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43 R. Zimmerman, "Memory and Form Criticism: The Typicality of Memory as a Bridge between Orality and Literality in the Early Christian Remembering Process," in Weissenrieder and Coote, *Interface* (see n. 18), 130–143, here 138. See also id., "Formen und Gattungen als Medien der Jesuserinnerug: Zur Rückgewinnung der Diachronie in der Formgeschichte des Neuen Testaments," *JBTh* 22 (2007), 131–167; id., "Gleichnisse als Medien der Jesuserinnerung: Die Historizität der Jesusparabeln im Horizont der Gedächtnisforschung," in *Hermeneutik der Gleichnisse Jesu: Methodische Neuansätze zum Verstehen urchristlicher Parabeltexte* (ed. R. Zimmerman with G. Kern; WUNT 231, Tübingen, 2008), 87–121.
44 Zimmermann, "Geschichtstheorien" (see n. 3), 421.
45 A. Kirk, "The Memory-Tradition Nexus in the Synoptic Tradition: Memory, Media, and Symbolic Representation," in Thatcher, *Memory and Identity* (see n. 29), 131–159, here 132–134.
46 These criticisms reached an apex in Keith and Le Donne, *Jesus* (see n. 37).

flects the present of early Christians crafting, fabricating, and transmitting the traditions (*Sitz im Leben der Kirche*).[47]

As has already been discussed, however, the base assertion of sociological approaches to memory – from Halbwachs to the present day and across the spectrum of presentism and the continuity perspective – is that all memory is inextricably bound to the social frameworks of the present that enable the articulation and conceptualization of the past. If this is the case, then the assumption that scholars can separate and recover historical reality from individual or group interpretation of that reality is problematic. "If 'experience' [...] is always embedded in and occurs through narrative frames, then there is no primal, unmediated experience that can be recovered. The distinction between history and memory in such accounts is a matter of disciplinary power rather than of epistemological privilege."[48]

The "disciplinary power" of the criteria approach in historical Jesus studies has been considerable, extending back hundreds of years and in some quarters having "attained an almost canonical character."[49] Nevertheless, it is untenable. As Rodríguez notes, "Memory does not [...] preserve the past in a way that allows for the separation of historical fact and later interpretation."[50] In light of the new historiography in Jesus studies, discussed immediately below, one should note here that Rodríguez does not claim that historians are incapable of making informed decisions about "historical fact" and "later interpretation." He asserts only that historians cannot separate the tradition itself in this manner. Joining a chorus of other critics, numerous Gospels scholars engaging memory studies

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47 Käsemann, "Problem" (see n. 21), 34–35. For this point at length, see Keith, "Indebtedness" (see n. 37), 25–40; id., "Memory" (see n. 20), 155–177; id., *Jesus' Literacy* (see n. 20), 27–70. See also Kirk, "Memory Theory" (see n. 28), 814; J. Schröter, "The Criteria of Authenticity in Jesus Research and Historiographical Method," in Keith and Le Donne, *Jesus* (see n. 37), 49–70, here 50.

48 J.K. Olick and J. Robbins, "Social Memory Studies: From 'Collective Memory' to the Historical Sociology of Mnemonic Practices," *Annual Review of Sociology* 24 (1998), 105–140, here 110.

49 K. Haacker, "'What Must I Do to Inherit Eternal Life?': Implicit Christology in Jesus' Sayings about Life and the Kingdom," in *Jesus Research: An International Perspective* (ed. J.H. Charlesworth and P. Pokorný; Grand Rapids, Mich., 2009), 140–153, here 140. G. Theissen and D. Winter, *The Quest for the Plausible Jesus: The Question of Criteria* (trans. M.E. Boring; Louisville, Ky., 2002), 261, trace elements of the criterion of dissimilarity back to Martin Luther in 1521.

50 Rodríguez, *Structuring Early Christian Memory* (see n. 19), 57. Similarly, A. Kirk, "Memory," in Kelber and Byrskog, *Jesus in Memory* (see n. 18), 155–172, here 169; Le Donne, *Historiographical Jesus* (see n. 39), 18.

have thus rejected the traditional criteria of authenticity as a legitimate tool in historical Jesus studies.[51]

3. The New Historiography

This rather simple observation about the inseparable nature of past reality and present interpretation has toppled over a hundred years of method in historical Jesus studies because it requires a redefinition of "history" and "memory" that does not hold these two concepts in opposition by defining the former as the past that historians must recover from interpretations in the sources and the latter as interpretations in the sources from which the past must be recovered. In Part One, we saw a similar development in the memory theories of Halbwachs and Assmann. In most cases, at stake is not whether there is a conceptual, heuristic, distinction between the actual past and interpretations of it, but rather (1) the role of interpretive categories in approaching that past and (2) what "approaching" the actual past actually entails. This shift in memory theory dovetails with similar developments in theories of history and orality studies.[52] Applications of these theories to the Gospels collectively represent a new historiography in historical Jesus studies that breaks sharply from the atomistic criteria ap-

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51 D.C. Allison, Jr., *Constructing Jesus: Memory, Imagination, and History* (Grand Rapids, Mich., 2010), x, 1–30, 153, 231; id., *The Historical Christ and the Theological Jesus* (Grand Rapids, Mich., 2009), 22–23, 54–78; Eve, *Behind the Gospels* (see n. 19), 130, 183; Keith, "Indebtedness" (see n. 37), 37–40; id., "Memory" (see n. 20), 155–177; id., *Jesus' Literacy* (see n. 20), 27–70; Kirk and Thatcher, "Jesus Tradition" (see n. 20), 27–28, 34; R. Rodríguez, "Authenticating Critera: The Use and Misuse of a Critical Method," *JSHJ* 7 (2009), 152–167; id., "The Embarrassing Truth about Jesus: The Criterion of Embarrassment and the Failure of Historical Authenticity," in Keith and Le Donne, *Jesus* (see n. 37), 132–151, here 146–148; id., *Structuring Early Christian Memory* (see n. 19), 220–221; Schröter, "Criteria of Authenticity" (see n. 47), 49–70. Cf. David S. du Toit, "Der unähnliche Jesus: Eine kritische Evaluierung der Entstehung des Differenzkriteriums und seiner geschichts- und erkenntnistheoretischen Voraussetzungen," in *Der historische Jesus: Tendenzen und Perspektiven der gegenwärtigen Forschungen* (ed. J. Schröter and R. Brucker, BZNW 114; Berlin, 2002), 89–129. Cf. also Le Donne, *Historiographical Jesus* (see n. 39), 87. I have argued that Le Donne and others should abandon the criteria approach, rather than rehabilitate it, in light of their correct rejections of its underlying modernist assumptions (Keith, "Indebtedness" [see n. 37], 40–47).

52 For an excellent overview, see Zimmermann, "Geschichtstheorien" (see n. 3).

proach and similar approaches that focus on isolated sayings or actions of Jesus.[53]

Jens Schröter has consistently led these efforts to construct "neutestamentliche Wissenschaft jenseits des Historismus."[54] It is notable that Foster's and Zeba Crook's recent criticisms of social memory applications in Gospels studies do not engage his work at all.[55] Already in 2011, Zimmermann could rightly refer to Schröter's studies as "bahnbrechend" and indicate that scholars have recognized them as such for some time already.[56]

In very general terms, Schröter proposes that "every approach to the historical Jesus behind the Gospels has to explain how these writings could have come into being as the earliest descriptions of this person."[57] Insofar as this approach therefore grounds historical Jesus enquiry in the past as portrayed in our extant sources, it is similar to what Assmann labelled mnemohistory, which also foregrounds the texts and traditions as they stand before historians. Related directly to this fact, Schröter insists that one cannot neatly separate past and present, history and interpretation, due to their intertwined and mutually-dependent natures in commemorative activity. He instead proposed in 1997 an approach to the his-

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53 Crook, "Collective Memory Distortion and the Quest for the Historical Jesus," *JSHJ* 11 (2013), 53–76, here 53, is correct, then, to note a trend "shifting away from the *ipsissima verba Jesu*," though it would be incorrect to relate this shift directly to issues of historical reliability, at least in terms of the full field.

54 See especially the collection of essays in J. Schröter, *Von Jesus zum Neuen Testament: Studien zur urchristlichen Theologiegeschichte und zur Entstehung des neutestamentlichen Kanons* (WUNT 204; Tübingen, 2007). The quotation is from the first chapter of this volume, "Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft jenseits des Historismus: Neuere Entwicklungen in der Geschichtstheorie und ihre Bedeutung für die Exegese urchristlicher Schriften," 9–22; repr. from *TLZ* 128 (2003), 855–866. See also his "Criteria of Authenticity" (see n. 47), 49–70; id., *Erinnerung an Jesu Worte* (see n. 28); id., "The Historical Jesus and the Sayings Tradition: Comments on Current Research," *Neot* 30.1 (1996), 151–168; id., "Jesus of Galilee: The Role of Location in Understanding Jesus," in Charlesworth and Pokorny, *Jesus Research* (see n. 49), 36–40.

55 Crook, "Collective Memory Distortion" (see n. 53); id., "Memory and the Historical Jesus," *BTB* 42 (2012), 196–203; Foster, "Memory" (see n. 31). Crook acknowledges this omission in "Gratitude and Comments to Le Donne," *JSHJ* 11 (2013), 98–105, here 99 n. 1.

56 Zimmermann, "Geschichtstheorien" (see n. 3) 420 n. 17; also 417: "Einige Jahre sind vergangen, seit Jens Schröter das Ende positivistischer Geschichtstheorie als Basis für die ntl. Wissenschaft proklamiert hat."

57 Schröter, "Historical Jesus" (see n. 54), 153; see also id., "Criteria of Authenticity" (see n. 47), 59–65; "Jesus of Galilee" (see n. 54), 37–38. For similar approaches to the historical Jesus, although not based on social memory theory, see J.D.G. Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, vol. 1 of *Christianity in the Making* (Grand Rapids, Mich., 2003); Theissen and Winter, *Quest for the Plausible Jesus* (see n. 49).

torical Jesus that sought to explain those connections, foreshadowing the demise of the criteria of authenticity and similar approaches:

Damit ware zugleich gewährleistet, daß die in den frühen Konzeptionen zur Sprache gebrachten *Erinnerungen* nicht *neben* ein Bild des „historischen Jesus" zu stehen kommen und somit die methodisch und historisch unsachgemäße Diastase von Verkündigung Jesu und ihrer Rezeption wieder aufbricht. Ein plausibler Weg kann vielmehr nur darin bestehen, beides als einander bedingende Komponenten zu verstehen, die nicht voneinander gelöst, sondern in ihrer gegenseitigen Bezogenheit aufeinander dargestellt werden müssen.[58]

With regard to the new historiography more broadly, four matters are important for understanding the work of Schröter and others in applying memory-based theories to historical Jesus studies: the actual past; the impact of the past; the role of interpretive categories in historical research; and applications of this research to particular problems in historical Jesus research.

3.1. The Actual Past

The role of the actual past in the new historiography is a less-than-straight-forward issue.[59] Some scholars remain interested in positing a historical reality "behind the Gospels." Like social memory theory outside Gospels scholarship, however, applications of the method inside Gospels scholarship differ on this knotty epistemological issue. Le Donne, for example, is more interested in halting historical enquiries at the earliest recoverable "mnemonic sphere" and finds discussion of a past reality that is separate from its commemorations unhelpful.[60] Schröter, Dale Allison, and I, to the contrary, agree that scholars can at least offer hypotheses about "how things could have been."[61]

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58 Schröter, *Erinnerung an Jesu Worte* (see n. 28), 485 (emphases original); see also id., "Criteria of Authenticity" (see n. 47), 68.

59 Cf. A.J.M. Wedderburn, *Jesus and the Historians* (WUNT 269; Tübingen, 2010), 99: "Behind Schröter's appeal to contemporary hermeneutical and epistemological insights [...] lies a complex and to the uninitiated somewhat confusing debate on the nature of history, the historian's work and historiography."

60 Le Donne, *Historiographical Jesus* (see n. 39), 86 (quotation), 76. See also S. Hübenthal, *Das Markusevangelium als kollektives Gedächtnis* (FRLANT 253; Göttingen, 2014), 70, with n. 239 (cf. n. 61 below).

61 Schröter, "Jesus of Galilee" (see n. 54), 38. See further Allison, *Constructing Jesus* (see n. 51), 1–30, 435–61; Keith, *Jesus' Literacy* (see n. 20), 175 n. 31. Thus, whereas Hübenthal, *Markusevangelium* (see n. 60), 70, with n. 239, is correct that I have failed to dismiss entirely questions about the actual past, she has failed to note that I also emphasize that scholars cannot attain the actual past or get "behind" the text; they can only (as I state in one of the quotations of me that she provides) propose possibilities that

This affirmation, which basically reflects the continuity perspective of Barry Schwartz and others, requires clear articulation because it is open to misunderstanding. All concerned acknowledge that the actual past is not accessible.[62] By affirming that scholars can theorize a historical Jesus behind the Gospels, then, this approach does not assume that scholars can access an un-interpreted past reality behind the Gospels, much less that they can do so by dispensing with the interpretive categories in the Gospels. These are the assumptions of form criticism, the criteria approach, and the historical positivism to which they gave expression. In stark contrast, the new historiography affirms that there is no access to the past apart from the interpretive categories of the sources. "It is only through the transmutation of formative events into transmissible tradition artifacts that the past is preserved at all."[63] Thus, in response to Alexander Wedderburn, Schröter states,

> Of course, I do not deny that there was a reality to which texts like, for example, the Gospels refer. But this of course does not mean that I would presuppose that this reality is accessible independently of the sources. The decisive point is […] that we have access to the past *only* by critical interpretation of the sources and never independently of them.[64]

Similarly, Zimmermann eloquently states, "Es gibt keine Historie jenseits des Textes. Aber es gibt Historie durch den Text und als Text."[65]

Since our evidence is incomplete, the historical task inevitably requires historical imagination based upon the available knowledge of the sociohistorical contexts in which memories of Jesus formed and circulated.[66] The end product is a re-presentation of the past in light of the sources,[67]

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can be judged as more-or-less plausible in light of the mnemonic evidence. I must further disagree with her implication that I have, in *Jesus' Literacy*, approached the varying portrayals of Jesus "nur historisch" and "nicht in Verbindung mit den erzählten Welten" (*Markusevangelium*, 70). To the contrary, I take the narrated worlds of Jesus in the Gospels as *foundational* to my method and offer a proposal about the historical Jesus only after a lengthy chapter on those narrations (Keith, *Jesus' Literacy*, 124–164).

62 Schröter, "Criteria of Authenticity" (see n. 47), 61–62: "It is a trivial insight […] but nevertheless important to keep in mind, that the past itself is over and can only be represented by way of interpretation of what remains from bygone times in the present."

63 Kirk, "Memory" (see n. 50), 169.

64 Schröter, "Criteria of Authenticity" (see n. 47), 59 n. 35 (emphasis original).

65 Zimmermann, "Geschichtstheorien" (see n. 3), 440.

66 Schröter, "Jesus of Galilee" (see n. 54), 37–38.

67 M. Moxter, "Erzählung und Ereignis: Über den Spielraum historischer Repräsentation," in Schröter and Brucker, *Der historische Jesus* (see n. 51), 57; Schröter, "Criteria of Authenticity" (see n. 47), 59–65; id., "Von der Historizität der Evangelien: Ein Beitrag zur gegenwärtigen Diskussion um den historischen Jesus," in id., *Von Jesus zum*

not a reconstruction of the past built with snippets that scholars have supposedly excavated from the evidence that exists. Other scholars have outlined similar historiographical programs on the basis of a memory approach.[68]

3.2. The Impact of the Past

The new historiography in Jesus studies reserves a possible role for the actual past in the production of social memory as part – and only one part – of a larger concern to take seriously the impact of the inertia of the commemorated past upon the formation of memory in the present in general. Reflecting the continuity perspective in Gospels studies, Kirk and Thatcher claim: "While social memory analysis is less confident that a putatively authentic deposit can be cleanly refined out of a given body of tradition, it remains convinced that the commemorated past bore upon the traditioning activities of the early communities in a far more thoroughgoing manner than the form critics envisioned."[69] Alternatively, Schröter notes, "Portrayals of Jesus, like other historical portrayals, are based on a link between the present and the past, and it is precisely here that they contribute to an understanding of the present as something that has taken shape."[70]

As noted earlier, this approach marks a clear difference with form criticism, and it is unfortunate that Foster overlooks this point (despite citing Kirk and Thatcher) in his claim that social memory theory's capacity to "provide insights" amounts to what form criticism has already contributed: "reflecting upon what [the Jesus traditions'] pastoral or pedagogical function might have been in early believing communities."[71] Certainly, this approach shares with form criticism a concern to understand and explain the Jesus tradition in light of its present community functions. Unlike form criticism, however, the new historiography insists that any given present community, as well as the Jesus tradition it transmits, is itself constituted by the received past. Thus, scholarly enquiry does not stop at observing coinciding elements of the Jesus tradition and community iden-

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Neuen Testament (see n. 54), 105–146, here 129–146; Zimmermann, "Geschichtstheorien" (see n. 3), 440.

68 Allison, *Constructing Jesus* (see n. 51), 16, 21; Eve, *Behind the Gospel* (see n. 19), 183; Keith, "Memory" (see n. 20), 175–176; id., *Jesus' Literacy* (see n. 20), 66–70; Le Donne, *Historiographical Jesus* (see n. 39), 84–92; Rodríguez, *Structuring Early Christian Memory* (see n. 19), 221.

69 Kirk and Thatcher, "Jesus Tradition" (see n. 20), 34.

70 Schröter, "Jesus of Galilee" (see n. 54), 38.

71 Foster, "Memory" (see n. 31), 202.

tity, but also asks programmatically about how the inherited past places pressure upon, and even forms, those present frameworks in various ways.[72]

Le Donne provides an excellent demonstration of how past interpretive categories can impress themselves upon the present with one typological category in the periods of time before and after Jesus.[73] He tracks how "Son of David" functioned as a Davidic, Solomonic, and therapeutic typological category in Judaism and early Christianity. Le Donne thus demonstrates the reception-history of the interpretive frameworks that enabled the authors of Mark's and Matthew's Gospels to stand in this interpretive trajectory in a distinct manner by attributing the category "Son of David" to Jesus. He shows that typological interpretation was not created *ex nihilo* by early Christians; rather it was inherited and provided both freedom and constraints in their fashioning of Jesus.

3.3. The Role of Interpretive Categories: Restrictive but Not Determinative

The Gospels' interpretive categories thus serve a corrective function in historical Jesus research insofar as a historical Jesus proposal must be able to explain their existence, as noted above with Schröter. Yet, *this memory approach does not predetermine how a historical Jesus proposal must explain their existence.* This point is important because it is where some critics of this method are guilty of misunderstanding and/or mischaracterizing applications of memory theory in Gospels studies by accusing scholars of using social memory theory to affirm the historical reliability of the Gospels. For example, Foster makes accusations that scholars using memory theory do so as a "trendy means of claiming that the community memories of early believers provide reliable access to the historical

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72 Foster has possibly missed this point because he misunderstood the continuity perspective of Schwartz and others. According to Foster, "On this model [the continuity perspective], the *kernel of historical reality that may be embedded in politically overlaid social memory* has been remoulded in order to communicate contemporary beliefs" and "a *historical kernel* may still be present although it has become subservient to contemporary needs" ("Memory" [see n. 31], 197, 202, respectively; emphases added). The notion of an "overlaid" "historical kernel" is a distinctively historical-positivist idea of the form critics and not at home in social memory discourse. Social memory theorists of every stripe affirm that "politically overlaid social memory" is all that there ever was in collective memory. The important point of Schwartz and others is that the precise shape of the political overlay reflects the influence of the past in addition to the influence of the present.

73 Le Donne, *Historiographical Jesus* (see n. 39), 93–268.

Jesus,"[74] that "those who employ 'memory' in historical Jesus research" do so by "lauding memory as a breakthrough that allows reliable access to the historical Jesus,"[75] and that "New Testament scholars" (apparently in general) who use memory theory offer a "catch-cry that social memory theory establishes historical reliability."[76]

Foster's accusations may have traction with two or three of the scholars he cites, but these blanket assertions that tie social memory theory directly and uncritically to the issue of historical reliability (to be discussed further below) are unwarranted. In making them, Foster ignores numerous scholars applying social memory theory to the Gospels who voice a contrary opinion.

"It is [...] not the sources themselves which tell the historian what he or she has to say." (Schröter)[77] – "This methodology does not comment upon or assume the historical reliability of those perceptions at the outset." (Keith)[78] – "The Gospels often contain competing, contradictory memories of Jesus that cannot all be historically accurate. Early Christians undoubtedly did remember him incorrectly at times. But, as a first level of investigation, one must admit that the *historical* or *earthly* Jesus was a person capable of producing those memories, even the possibly inaccurate ones." (Keith)[79] – "These [mnemonically-shaped Jesus traditions] give us no royal road to the historical Jesus." (Kirk)[80] – "I am not, I should emphatically add, urging that all the stories in the Gospels must be historical. [...] That is, I am not, a priori, deciding how much history is or is not in the Gospels. [...] Rather, I am making a point about method, about how we may proceed, and contending that the historian should heed before all else the general impressions that our primary sources produce. [...] This requires that we begin, although we need not end, by asking, 'What are our general impressions?'" (Allison)[81] – "Reading New Testament texts as *kommunikatives Gedächtnis* means that one cannot presume to know exactly how the events memorialized in the texts really took place." (Hübenthal)[82]

With explicit statements like this in the literature, one must recognize Foster's description of New Testament scholars employing memory theory as

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74 Foster, "Memory" (see n. 31), 193. It is not entirely clear what Foster means by social memory theory being "trendy." As Part One of this study showed, the theory's origins are in the early twentieth century, as are the origins of form criticism, which Foster prefers (ibid., 227).

75 Foster, "Memory" (see n. 31), 198.

76 Foster, "Memory" (see n. 31), 202.

77 Schröter, "Criteria of Authenticity" (see n. 47), 64.

78 C. Keith, "The Fall of the Quest for an Authentic Jesus," in Keith and Le Donne, *Jesus* (see n. 37), 200–205, here 205.

79 Keith, "Memory" (see n. 20), 172 (emphasis original); cf. id., *Jesus' Literacy* (see n. 20), 64.

80 Kirk, "Memory Theory" (see n. 28), 839.

81 Allison, *Constructing Jesus* (see n. 51), 16.

82 Hübenthal, "Social and Cultural Memory" (see n. 2), 208.

one-sided. The majority of memory theorists in Gospels research do not affirm the ideas that Foster attributes to the entire group. Selective representation of the field is also a problem with Crook's recent critique, as Le Donne notes.[83] The historiographical shift toward offering explanations for the sources in historical Jesus studies rather than sifting through them should therefore not be interpreted as an automatic affirmation of those sources' historical trustworthiness, whether by supporters or detractors of social memory theory.

3.4. Applications of the Memory Approach to Specific Issues in Historical Jesus Research

In this sense, and before moving fully to the important issue of the historical reliability of the Gospels, I must note another inaccuracy in Foster's portrait of social memory theory in Gospels scholarship. He claims,

It is notable that the current application of memory studies to the Jesus tradition most frequently remains embedded in the theoretical domain, with little attempt to show how the category of memory actually allows for specific traditions to be traced back to the Jesus of history. Instead, the level of argument appears to have stalled with assertions that social memory validates the historicity of the events it purports to communicate.[84]

Foster later reiterates, "There has been no thoroughgoing application of social memory theory to individual Gospel pericopae in a way that would demonstrate this to be a useful hermeneutical tool for clarifying historicity."[85]

In contrast to these claims, in a 2009 monograph, Le Donne addresses the discrepancies between the Temple Saying in Mark 14:58 and John 2:18–22, wherein Mark claims that Jesus never made such a claim and John claims that Jesus did make such a claim, but meant it metaphorically.[86] Based on tracking the "refraction trajectories," Le Donne posits that

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83 Crook, "Collective Memory Distortion" (see n. 53), 53–76; A. Le Donne, "The Problem of Selectivity in Memory Research: A Response to Zeba Crook," *JSHJ* 11 (2013), 77–97. Cf. also G. Carey, "Moving Things Ahead: A Lukan Redactional Technique and Its Implications for Gospel Origins," *BibInt* 21.3 (2013), 302–319, who argues against Bauckham and Dunn specifically but takes them generally as indicative of "memory-oriented accounts of Gospel origins" (ibid., 302). As stated above, my point is not that this is an inaccurate descriptor for these scholars' work, but that "memory-oriented" Gospels scholarship is much broader and certainly not monolithic on these issues, as Carey's citation of Schröter indicates (ibid., 305). The argument that Carey forwards for understanding Lukan redaction is not contrary to social memory theory properly understood.
84 Foster, "Memory" (see n. 31), 198.
85 Foster, "Memory" (see n. 31), 202.
86 Le Donne, *Historiographical Jesus* (see n. 39), 248–257.

Jesus was early perceived as having "made a claim similar to what Mark's false witness accused Jesus of saying in 14:58."[87] Le Donne revisits this topic in an essay and popular-level book, both published in 2011.[88]

In a 2010 *New Testament Studies* article, I addressed John 7:15's claim that Jesus's scribal literacy was a matter of debate among some members of his audience.[89] In that article, I argue that audience confusion on the issue during the ministry of Jesus best explains how Christians already in the first century came to view Jesus as a scribal-illiterate carpenter who is rejected as a synagogue teacher (Mark 6:3; cf. Matt 13:55) and a scribal-literate teacher who reads in synagogue (Luke 4:16–20), which are of course mutually-exclusive historical portrayals. I then developed this argument with considerably more detail and engagement with memory studies in a 2011 monograph.[90] I argue there that the portrayal of Jesus as a scribal-illiterate teacher in Mark 6:3 and other early Christian texts is historically accurate and the portrayal of Jesus as a scribal-literate teacher in Luke 4:16–20 and other early Christian texts is historically inaccurate.[91] I argue further, however, that Luke's portrayal of a scribal-literate Jesus was not a wholesale fabrication but likely the result of mixed perceptions of Jesus vis-à-vis scribal authority in his ministry, which led many of his audiences to consider him a scribal-literate teacher in his own right. In short, I posit a historical reality that best explains the extant sources (including a socio-historical context for the formation of inaccurate memory) rather than stamp one as authentic and the other as inauthentic and proceed to propose a historical Jesus based only on the alleged authentic tradition.[92]

Foster's failure to interact with or cite these studies is unfortunate and leads him to conclude inaccurately that applications of memory theory to historical Jesus studies are less advanced than they are, in addition to portraying them as generally restricted to defenses of the historical reliability of the Gospels. Zimmermann has concluded the precise opposite. After

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87   Le Donne, *Historiographical Jesus* (see n. 39), 252.

88   A. Le Donne, *Historical Jesus: What Can We Know and How Can We Know It?* (Grand Rapids, Mich., 2011), 120–132; id., "Memory, Commemoration and History in John 2:19–22: A Critique and Application of Social Memory," in Le Donne and Thatcher, *Fourth Gospel* (see n. 30), 186–204.

89   C. Keith, "The Claim of John 7.15 and the Memory of Jesus' Literacy," *NTS* 56.1 (2010), 44–63.

90   Keith, *Jesus' Literacy* (see n. 20).

91   Keith, *Jesus' Literacy* (see n. 20), 124–188.

92   In *Jesus against the Scribal Elite* (see n. 21), I extend the significance of this conclusion to the historical origins and nature of the controversy narratives.

commenting positively upon the initial work of Schröter and then the newer studies of Rodríguez, me, and Le Donne, he says, "Der Ansatz von Le Donne wagt nicht nur begriffliche ('mnemonic evidence') und methodische Innovation ('Triangulation'), sondern zeigt auch Konvergenzen zu Arbeiten, die die Medialität der Erinnerung hervorheben und diese z. B. im Blick auf das NT auf die Typizität von Texten, d. h. Gattungen, zuspitzen."[93]

Therefore, not only has a new historiography begun to emerge in Gospels studies, scholars have recognized it as a significant development and it has begun to take specific shape in contributions to historical Jesus research beyond methodological discussions. No doubt much work remains here, including the need for more applications to specific issues. But it certainly is not the case that social memory theory has proven a "dead end" in historical Jesus research. Neither is it the case that there is "an emerging consensus that memory is inherently reliable."[94]

4. Social Memory Theory and the Historical Reliability of the Gospels

As the previous discussion has already revealed, undoubtedly the greatest source of contention between critics and supporters of social memory theory in Gospels scholarship has been the employment of the theory in arguments for the historical reliability of the Gospels. Richard Bauckham, Markus Bockmuehl, Craig Keener (usually following Bauckham alone), Robert McIver, and others have appealed to memory studies in arguments for the general historical reliability of the Jesus tradition, or at least the fact that it stems from eyewitness testimony.[95] Foster, Crook, and others have countered that memory studies either fail to favor the historical reliability

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93 Zimmermann, "Geschichtstheorien" (see n. 3), 421.
94 Crook, "Collective Memory Distortion" (see n. 53), 64. On Crook's retraction of this statement, see below n. 98.
95 R. Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony* (Grand Rapids, Mich., 2006), 319–357; M. Bockmuehl, *Seeing the Word: Refocusing New Testament Study* (STI; Grand Rapids, Mich., 2006), 166–178; C.S. Keener, *The Historical Jesus of the Gospels* (Grand Rapids, Mich., 2009), 144–152, 445 n. 100, 466 n. 109, 471 n. 58, 476 n. 157; cf. 323; R.K. McIver, *Memory, Jesus, and the Synoptic Gospels* (RBS 59; Atlanta, 2011). See also P.R. Eddy and G.A. Boyd, *The Jesus Legend: A Case for the Historical Reliability of the Synoptic Tradition* (Grand Rapids, Mich.; 2007), 275–285.

of the Gospels or, in fact, favor the historical unreliability of the Gospels.[96] They have thus characterized appropriations of social memory theory in Gospels scholarship in general as "assertions that social memory validates the historicity of the events it purports to communicate."[97]

The foregoing discussion should suffice for demonstrating that such portraits of social memory theory's presence in Gospels scholarship are so narrow as to be caricatures. The majority of scholars applying the theory do not use it to those ends.[98] Nevertheless, the general thrust of their argument is correct. Social memory theory does not necessarily support the historical reliability of the Gospel narratives. Receiving less attention in this debate, however, is the fact that social memory theory, in and of itself, equally fails to support the historical unreliability of the Gospel narratives. I suggest here that this to-and-fro over the reliability of memory has obscured social memory theory's genuine contributions to Gospels scholarship, which reside in its challenges to prior (particularly form-critical) tradition models.

4.1. Social Memory Theory Does Not Establish the Gospels as Reliable or Unreliable

First, and perhaps most importantly, social memory theory – as a theory – does not *establish* the Gospels as historically reliable or unreliable.[99] There seems to be a logic to which both sides of this debate adhere: If the Jesus tradition is memory, and memory is inherently (un)reliable, then the Jesus tradition is inherently (un)reliable. This logic is flawed, however, because "memory is a process, not a thing, and it works differently at different points in time."[100] Stated otherwise, memory can be both reliable and un-

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96 Foster, "Memory" (see n. 31), 191–202, 225–227; Crook, "Collective Memory Distortion" (see n. 53), 53–76; id., "Gratitude" (see n. 55), 98–105, id., "Memory and the Historical Jesus" (see n. 55), 196–203. See also J.C.S. Redman, "How Accurate Are Eyewitnesses? Bauckham and the Eyewitnesses in the Light of Psychological Research," *JBL* 129.1 (2010), 177–197.

97 Foster, "Memory" (see n. 31), 198. Similarly, Crook, "Collective Memory Distortion" (see n. 53), 53.

98 Admirably, in light of Le Donne's trenchant response, Crook, "Gratitude" (see n. 55), 101, has retracted his claim that there is an "emerging consensus" among Gospels scholars that memory theory indicates that the Gospels are reliable.

99 On the resonance between this sentence and S.J. Joseph, *The Nonviolent Messiah: Jesus, Q, and the Enochic Tradition* (Minneapolis, 2014), 6, see n. 17 in Part One (see n. 1).

100 Olick and Robbins, "Social Memory Studies" (see n. 48), 122, in reference to B. Zelizer, "Reading the Past against the Grain: The Shape of Memory Studies," *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 12 (1995), 214–239.

reliable, which Crook rightly notes.[101] Social memory theory is a tool for understanding the process by which groups conceptualize their individual and communal pasts from the position of the present (itself constituted by the received past). And – importantly – historically accurate and historically inaccurate social memories were subject to the same mnemonic processes in terms of formation and articulation.[102] Social memory theory is not, therefore, in and of itself, a tool that establishes or pronounces memory as historically accurate or inaccurate.

As we saw earlier, this fact does not mean that social memory theory is irrelevant for questions of historical accuracy. But it does serve to underscore that the analytical categories of "memory" and "social memory" do not function like a socket into which one plugs the Jesus tradition, automatically granting it currency as generally reliable or generally unreliable. Theorizing historical accuracy is more difficult than stating generalizations of memory.

4.2. Historical Inaccuracy versus Historical Situatedness

Second, and related directly to the fact that social memory can be historically accurate and historically inaccurate, there is a distinction between historical accuracy and historical situatedness that some scholars have not sufficiently observed. Crook, for example, cites historically inaccurate group memories and refers to them as "wholly manufactured" and "invented wholesale."[103] These descriptors and the thrust of the argument in which Crook uses them imply that fabricated or false memories are detached from history. He thus claims to use the phrase "memory manufacturing" in order "to refer to the creation of memories that have no basis in an historical event [...]. They are either so grossly exaggerated so as to be wholly new, or they are wholly manufactured or fictional."[104]

This is a problem because nothing is entirely detached from history, including lies and false memories. Although it may be true that some group memories have scant (or no) basis in the historical event *that they claim to portray*, this means neither that they have no basis in "an historical event" nor that they have no grounding in the *reception-history* of

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101 Crook, "Collective Memory Distortion" (see n. 53), 75.

102 Thus, I do not consider eyewitness memory to be *qualitatively* better than non-eyewitness memory, despite the important rhetorical value of claims for eyewitness testimony in both the ancient and modern contexts.

103 Crook, "Collective Memory Distortion" (see n 53), 70, 66.

104 Crook, "Collective Memory Distortion" (see n. 53), 65 n. 44.

the event they claim to portray. Historically accurate and inaccurate memories alike take shape in particular socio-historical circumstances. And these socio-historical circumstances, in one way or another, emerge from prior socio-historical circumstances. This point reveals a great failure of form criticism and the criteria approach to the historical Jesus – the failure to ask how the interpretations of the early Church emerged from a historical progression that began with Jesus.[105]

Stated otherwise, the mere fact of a collective memory's location on that progression leads automatically neither to the conclusion that one can trace the memory to the historical Jesus nor to the conclusion that one can trace the memory to the early Church's theological imagination. Excluding either possibility from the historical task at the outset is precisely the methodological deficiency that the new historiographers in Jesus studies seek to overcome. The historical progression itself needs a historical explanation[106] that accounts – to the best of one's ability with the limited evidence – for how the progression could have proceeded from the historical Jesus to any one reception of memory concerning him. "On the one hand, this history has carried the tradition further and further from Jesus [...]. On the other hand, this history of effects was set in motion by Jesus himself."[107] Thus, "Comprehensive historical plausibility does not construct a picture of Jesus until it has first surveyed the whole scheme of things that includes context and history of effects."[108]

This point is also why it is important to note that the continuity perspective asserts primarily that there is continuity between earlier and later instances of memory, not necessarily that there is continuity between the actual past and later instances of memory. In terms of historical Jesus research, this is why Schröter has insisted that Jesus historians must account for the interpretations of Jesus that exist in our sources, but insisted equally strongly that neither those sources nor any particular theory dictate *how* a historian must account for them. The historian's responsibility

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105 See also R. Rodríguez, "'According to the Scriptures': Suffering and the Psalms in the Speeches in Acts," in Thatcher, *Memory and Identity* (see n. 29), 239–260; Schröter, *Von Jesus zum Neuen Testament* (see n. 54), 111–117.

106 Similarly, J.K. Olick, V. Vinitzky-Seroussi, and D. Levy, introduction to *The Collective Memory Reader* (New York, 2011), 3–62, 44: "A commemoration of a past event, moreover, is itself an event and thus worthy of historical analysis."

107 Theissen and Winter, *Quest for the Plausible Jesus* (see n. 49), 174. See also their programmatic statement ibid., 212: "What we know of Jesus as a whole must allow him to be recognized within his contemporary Jewish context and must be compatible with the Christian (canonical and noncanonical) history of his effects."

108 Theissen and Winter, *Quest for the Plausible Jesus* (see n. 49), 188.

is to explain how any given instance of reception of the Jesus tradition in the extant sources reflects the pressures of the present *and* the past, even if that instance of reception is an attempt to subvert the ideologies of either source of pressure.

In some cases, the attempt to explain the extant sources leads to a conclusion about the historical Jesus and the (un)reliability of particular traditions, as the examples of my and Le Donne's studies earlier indicate. Since social memory theory seeks primarily to understand continuity and discontinuity in the formation and articulation of collective memory, it is most advantageous to historical Jesus scholars in instances of multiple, particularly conflicting, interpretations of Jesus. From these one can, in Le Donne's words, "triangulate" a possible past reality that could have led to them. It is then the Jesus scholar's responsibility to forward convincing arguments about precisely how a proposed past led to those early Christian interpretations.

One side-effect of this method, therefore, is that even historically inaccurate Jesus traditions are regarded as holding historical value for scholars. This point requires nuance, however. It would be exceedingly easy to confuse an affirmation that various receptions of Jesus are of value to the scholar with an affirmation of their historical accuracy. Such confusion possibly underlies Wedderburn's concerns that scholars are using the new historiography to dodge the "unwelcome implications of historical criticism,"[109] and possibly also Foster's and Crook's accusations that scholars are appealing to memory as a form of apologetics. Overly-conservative misappropriations of social memory theory also participate in this confusion. The preceding discussion has thus clarified that approaching the Jesus tradition as historically-situated social memory does not predetermine how that tradition is historically-situated and thus its historical accuracy.

4.3. Enabling Responsible Historiography

Therefore, and third, although social memory theory does make a definitive contribution to the new historiography in historical Jesus studies, fanfare and fears of its implications for historical reliability have, at times, been equally misplaced. Pronouncements on the historical reliability of the Gospels remain as anchored in scholarly argumentation and proposals for plausible historical scenarios as they always have been. What is

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109 Wedderburn, *Jesus* (see n. 59), v.

new in the new historiography is not the conclusions that scholars reach, but rather how scholars use the extant historical evidence in reaching their conclusions. The new historiographers no longer see the Jesus tradition as we have it in the Gospels as materials that we must first purify down to historically useful data by means of separation from early Christian interpretive activity. The tradition is now viewed as a finished commemorative product that need not be dissected so much as accounted for. Historical Jesus research has changed at its roots, as this new understanding of the Jesus tradition has broken away from atomistic, form-critically inspired, approaches to the Gospels and historical Jesus such as the criteria of authenticity.

Social memory theory's contribution to discussions of the historical reliability of the Jesus tradition thus occurs at the methodological level of our understanding of the nature of the Jesus tradition, not the level of determination of conclusions about the historical Jesus. It clarifies that those arguments that actually account for the historical evidence – however they may account for them – are better than arguments that explain only part of the evidence. To repeat the main point of the conclusion of Part One, social memory theory is not a replacement for scholarly historiography; it is a tool that enables scholars to perform that task responsibly in light of the extant evidence.

5. Conclusion: Approaching the Past and the Past Approaching

These are not the only four areas of application of social memory theory to Jesus studies. I have chosen these areas because they collectively highlight a particular contribution that social memory theory makes to Jesus studies – articulation of how modern scholars should approach the past of Jesus and his earliest interpreters and how the past of Jesus approached(s) his earliest interpreters and modern scholars. These core issues always have been and always will be at the center of Gospels studies. From this perspective, social memory theory's contribution to New Testament studies does not reside in its innovation. Rather, as its first decade in Gospels studies reveals, social memory theory's contribution to Gospels studies resides in its capacity to move standard lines of enquiry away from a historical-positivist methodological framework. Far from being a dead end, it is a pathway to the future, insisting that the complexities of the past/present interaction in

commemorative activities of early Christians must find expression in a field of scholarship that has previously demonstrated a tendency to simplify them in an unwarranted fashion.

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