



The Reliability of the Gospel Tradition

Birger Gerhardsson



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The historical reliability of the Gospels has been discussed from the Enlightenment onwards. At present, many scholars assume that the canonical Gospels as we have them are essentially fictions constructed near the end of the first century to meet the needs of the Christian movement of that time and that they give us very little reliable information regarding the life and teachings of Jesus. But have these scholars really understood the nature of the written Gospels? Birger Gerhardsson has devoted almost the whole of his academic career to the study of the oral tradition that is the basis of our canonical Gospels. His groundbreaking doctoral dissertation, Memory and Manuscript, drew a parallel between the way in which the rabbis taught their disciples and the way Jesus taught his disciples: both required memorization of the master's teaching. Rabbinic disciples handed on their masters' tradition with great care, and we can be sure that the disciples of Jesus would have been no less careful with what he taught them! The Reliability of the Gospel Tradition presents three studies that illuminate how the early Christians passed on tradition. "The Origins of the Gospel Tradition" gives an accessible review of the debate regarding the extent to which the New Testament evangelists enable us to hear the voice of Jesus. "The Path of the Gospel Tradition" contains a critical discussion of the approach of the formeritical school to the problem of the early Christian tradition, ending with an alternative sketch of the path of the tradition. "The Gospel Tradition" offers a rather detailed picture of various aspects of the content and method of early Christian tradition and assesses the reliability of the four oldest of the extant written records.

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