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Shaping Memory by Mimeses: A Living Tradition

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Résumé :

The Christian intellectual tradition and faith are inescapably historical. The rise of normative Christianity and the Christian rhetoric of authenticity have been perceptively studied from a variety of angles in recent scholarship. One of the ways of looking into the rise of Christian way of life is by tracing exemplars. This concept, known as mimeses is not about the history of the reception of a particular theology and/or philosophy. Instead, it is about how some key exemplars used the Pauline or Petrine corpus along or other Scriptures along with the classical Paideia in order to define themselves over against other groups. This deals with the cult of exempla, authorizing the author, and genealogical demarcation in creating social boundaries to forge an identity. In this context, a teacher's rhetoric was inextricably bound to the example set by the teacher's behavior, and it is therefore impossible to understand one without the other. In this construction of identity, the concepts of exempla, imitatio, and the rule of faith are important themes for the Apostles. Indeed, language is a vehicle of memory. Without memory, our intellectual life and faith are impoverished, barren, ephemeral and subject to the whims of the moment. The great religions of the world are traditions of learning as well as of faith. Traditions are sort of "created" memory that enshrined, legitimize, and form ways of life that echo deep within humanity. In the following paragraphs, I want to reflect on a way of looking at tradition through the lens of memory that has huge implications for our contemporary living.

La tradition intellectuelle chrétienne et la foi sont nécessairement historiques. La montée du christianisme normatif et de la rhétorique chrétienne de l'authenticité ont récemment fait l'objet d'études approfondies sous divers angles. L'une des façons d'envisager l'émergence du mode de vie chrétien consiste à en mettre à jour les modèles. Ce concept, connu sous le nom de mimesis, ne concerne pas tant l'histoire de la réception d'une théologie et/ou d'une philosophie particulière, que la façon dont certains modèles clés se sont servis des corpus paulinien, pétrinien ou d'autres Écritures telle que la Paideia classique pour se définir par rapport à d'autres groupes. Cette façon de faire n'est pas étrangère au culte de l'exempla, qui autorise l'auteur à créer des frontières sociales mais aussi des démarcations généalogiques pour forger une identité (ici, l'identité chrétienne). Dans ce contexte, la rhétorique d'un enseignant se retrouve inextricablement liée à l'exemple qu'il donne par son comportement. Il est donc impossible de comprendre l'un sans l'autre. Dans cette construction identitaire, les concepts d'exempla, d'imitatio et de foi sont des thèmes fondamentaux pour les apôtres. En effet, le langage est un véhicule de la mémoire. Sans mémoire, notre vie intellectuelle et notre foi sont appauvries, stériles, éphémères et soumises aux caprices du moment. Les grandes religions du monde sont autant des traditions d'apprentissage que de foi. Les traditions sont une sorte de mémoire « créée » qui ont consacré, légitimé et formé des modes de vie qui résonnent profondément au cœur de l'humanité. Dans cet article, je propose de réfléchir à une forme de regard sur la tradition par la lorgnette de la mémoire, pour en montrer les implications majeures pour notre mode de vie contemporain.

In the Greco-Roman world, of the several ways that lead to virtue, perhaps one of the most helpful is the way of *imitation*. By observing the lives of holy/wise men and women, and imitating their deeds, we become virtuous. Put differently, before we can become doers, we first must be spectators. Origen of Alexandria, said, “Genuine transformation of life comes from reading the ancient Scriptures, learning who the just were and imitating them,” and he prudently added, “learning who were reprovved and guarding against falling under the same censure.”¹

The purpose of this paper is to show and trace out the significance of the historical exemplary lives of Greco-Roman teachers, and Church Fathers. In particular, to see how their use of deeds were incorporated into their text, teachings and interpretations. These varied teachers were constructing a social identity. In no way is this illustrative overview intended to be an exhaustive analysis.² These exemplars-as-teachers are not possible without linguistic and hermeneutical exercises and techniques. Textual parsing was an important tool in the teacher’s tool box as they created a world where students can follow to become living witness, exemplars. Language is a vehicle of memory. The Christian intellectual tradition and faith is inescapably historical. Without memory, our intellectual life and faith are impoverished, barren, ephemeral and subject to the whims of the moment.

The Culture of Mimeses

This concept of *mimeses* is not about the history of the reception of a particular theology, like the Pauline or Petrine theologies in the second-century or the late antique period. Instead, it is about how the Fathers used the Pauline or Petrine corpus along with other Scriptures in order to define themselves over against other groups. Furthermore, it deals with the cult of *exempla*, authorizing the author, and

¹ Origen, *Homilies on Jeremiah* 4.5.

² The rise of normative Christianity and the Christian rhetoric of authenticity have been perceptively studied from a variety of angles in recent scholarship. A few notable examples are: A. Le Boulluec, *La nation d’hérésie dans la littérature grecque, iie-iiiie siècles*, 2 vols. (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1985); D. K. Buell, *Making Christians: Clement of Alexandria and the Rhetoric of Legitimacy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999); Karen L. King, *What is Gnosticism?* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003). This dissertation shows that the concept of self-fashioning offers another vision. That is, we move to broader notions of self-creation and “the production of the sense of authenticity and interiority.” See E. Gunderson, *Staging Masculinity*, 21; Judith Lieu, *Neither Jew nor Greek: Constructing Early Christianity*, 2nd ed. (London: T. & T. Clark, 2005).

genealogical demarcation in creating social boundaries to forge an (Christian) identity. In this context, a teacher's rhetoric was inextricably bound to the example set by the teacher's behavior, and it is therefore impossible to understand one without the other. The rhetoric of identity is a legitimate method employed by late antiquity's Hellenistic intellectuals to define their history and the standards of their particular communities. In this construction of identity, the concepts of *exempla*, *imitatio*, the rule of faith, and the use of the Apostles like Paul are important themes.

Because of their authority and their exemplary lives, models of imitation, both textual and personal, were essential to all forms of ancient education. Teresa Morgan says that "imitation occurs at every stage of the *enkyklios paideia* and forms one of its most important articulating features. Imitation is a prime means of moving the pupil forward."³ Likewise, the church fathers' writing reveal the formation of an emerging Christian identity through the imitation of moral examples. This was not only an intellectual and theological project. It also involved setting a communal agenda and limiting social groups through an appeal to (apostolic) authority. For example, the second-century fathers championed their identity against alternatives suggested by pagan, Judaic, or Hellenistic authorities. In part, the fathers demonstrated their uniqueness (and perhaps superiority based) on the belief of revelation by the only true God. In addition to this argument from a theological view, they also offered humanistic arguments. This argument is partly based on the memory of the community, that is received traditions, and making prudent scholarly methodologies that was available in their milieu.

The *Paideia* in the Ancient Western World

Broadly speaking, in the Greco-Roman world, moral education was private and individual, based on a master-disciple relation that was nurtured through bonds of friendship, respect, and admiration. According to Peter Brown, "No student ever went, as we do, to a university conceived of as an impersonal institution of learning [...]. He would always have gone to a person—to Libanius, to Origen, to Proclus."⁴ Teresa Morgan gives two revealing insights into the ancient culture of learning. First, despite the relative paucity of functional literates, the Greek and Roman worlds were "profoundly literate societies." She observes that "from the early third

³ Teresa Morgan, *Literate Education in the Hellenistic and Roman Worlds* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 251.

⁴ Peter Brown, "The Saint as Exemplar in Late Antiquity," in *Saints and Virtues*, ed. John Stratton Hawley (Berkeley, 1987), 4.

century BCE until the end of the Roman empire, you could be fairly sure of finding a teacher, or more than one, in most towns and villages, in the forum, at the crossroads, in the gymnasium, or in a private house or garden.” Second, the typical course of “common” literate education, *enkyklios paideia*, was remarkably consistent “across vast geographical distances, a wide social spectrum and a timespan of nearly a thousand years,” with “much the same exercises in the same order taught, from the third century BCE onwards, everywhere from the palaces of kings and emperors to the village street.”⁵ These teachers made sure that the *paideia*, referring to the upbringing of children through training in literacy, virtue, numeracy, and ethnic history, were uniform and well dispersed. Gradually, *paideia* came to represent “the classical system of education and training,” which could encompass gymnastics, poetry, mathematics, music, astronomy, virtue, ethics, geography, rhetoric, and philosophy. In brief, what the Romans inherited from the Greek *paideia* culture was the “complete pedagogical course of study necessary to produce a well rounded, fully educated citizen.”⁶ *Paideia* for the Greeks and the Romans was a practice of enculturation and a tool of imperialism. Civilization and the rhetoric of *humanitas* were self-referential markers of identity. They were both literally and metaphorically, boundary-making concepts, which were continually contested, not only in forging identities, but also in competing for recognition as the premier civilized identity. As Morgan says, “literate education [was] a binding and differential force, an indicator and transformer of cultural status.”⁷

In addition, Tim Whitmarsh’s work explores the ways in which Greeks living under Roman rule during the second-century CE manifested their identity. He postulates that *paideia* is “(re)constructing their identities as Greeks and empowering themselves as a subject people by creatively retelling the sacred stories of their collective past through (re)articulate poesis in their present, the period of the “Second Sophistic.”⁸ Whitmarsh sets the stage for this argument by articulating the power of *paideutic mimesis* or “imitation” to form the “soul” of a man and by extension, a people. Whitmarsh shows that Plato is most famous for placing education in the service of the soul and making it a quest of the intellect, a mimetic process of the mind copying and seeking after union with the ideal. On the other hand, Aristotle and Plutarch argued that the practice of imitating cultural and

⁵ Morgan, *Literate Education*, 3-4.

⁶ Richard Tarnas, *The Passion of the Western Mind: Understanding the Ideas that Shaped Our World View* (New York: Ballantine, 1993), 29-30.

⁷ Morgan, *Literate Education*, 7.

⁸ Tim Whitmarsh, *Greek Literature and the Roman Empire: The Politics of Imitation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 71-88.

philosophical ideals actually altered the soul through repetition: the repeated act of imitative doing effected a somatic naturalization of what was repeated in the mind and soul of learners. Students both young and old were made and could be remade by what they repeatedly and habitually learned. Whitmarsh reads Greek literature of the Second Sophistic period as productive performances of identity, showing how Greeks of the “Second Sophistic” who mimed and re-narrated sacred stories from Homer and the gnomic poets remade themselves—(re)constructing cultural continuity with their high-status past by creating imagined communities of “universal Hellenism.”⁹ Their *mimesis* of stories of their sacred past was powerful enough to subvert and redistribute social power, even effecting ethnic transformation among the Romans. By reconstituting the heroes of Greece’s past in the present and re-narrating Hellenism convincingly as true civilization, Greeks under Roman rule led some of their political “betters” to imitate Greeks anew, to seek to become more Greek than the Greeks themselves in their quest for cultural domination of the known world.¹⁰ As we can see, the stories from the past were reshaped to meet the needs of the contemporary rhetorical and social identities.

Imitation in the Christian Formation

Several studies have looked at the broader social implications of classical rhetoric and its interaction with Christianity in Late Antiquity. Particularly notable are Peter Brown’s *Power and Persuasion*¹¹ and Averil Cameron’s *Christianity and the Rhetoric of Empire*.¹² Imitation is more than something that one does or actively chooses to do. As it turns out, it was rather passive. Echoing Morgan, she asserts that at least in childhood “imitation is still fundamentally a reaction to being presented with a certain type of learning experience, and Quintilian’s metaphors for it are largely to do with plants.”¹³ Likewise, the apostolic tradition through the lives of, writings of, and re-telling of stories about the apostles, creates boundaries by providing a living experience.

⁹ Whitmarsh, *Greek Literature*, 66.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 117-120.

¹¹ Peter Brown, *Power and Persuasion in Late Antiquity: Towards a Christian Empire* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992).

¹² Averil Cameron, *Christianity and the Rhetoric of Empire: The Development of Christian Discourse* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991).

¹³ Morgan, *Literate Education*, 252.

In her seminal work, *Imitating Paul*, Elizabeth Castelli has argued that “the notion of mimesis [...] in Paul’s letters [...] articulates and rationalizes as true and natural a particular set of power relations within the social formation of early Christian communities.”¹⁴ She demonstrates that Paul’s use of the notion of mimesis, or imitation, partakes of and exploits the full range of first century associations with the concept. She summarizes as follows: (1) Mimesis is always articulated as a hierarchical relationship, whereby the “copy” is but a derivation of the “model” and cannot aspire to the privileged status of the “model.” (2) Mimesis presupposes a valorization of sameness over against difference, and (3) The notion of the authority of the model plays a fundamental role in the mimetic relationship.¹⁵

In summary, we have briefly surveyed the model of imitation and its importance in the construction of identity. This shows that Christian identity, like other identities is constructed around successions of spiritual virtuosos that both guaranteed the continuity of the community’s traditions and also demonstrated the continually renewed presence of the same rule of faith. By the third century, the apostles were virtually unrivaled as authorizing ancestors of the legitimate leaders of the church. The constant negotiations and re-telling of the stories are aimed at supplying a social context for legitimacy and, in some cases, a historical concretization of illegitimacy, when disagreement ensues.

Why *Imitation*?

From the previous paragraphs, as illustrated briefly from the Greco-Roman identity constructions mirrored of sorts by the Christian writers and intellectuals, it follows that examples, imitation, and exemplars are both cultural markers and makers. For example, one can deduce that the elementary art of fashioning a clay pot or constructing a cabinet, learning to speak or sculpting a statue have their beginning in the imitation of what others do. This concept is at least as old as the Greeks. Perhaps, Plutarch’s magisterial tome *Lives* models it best. “Our senses,” says Plutarch, “apprehend the things they encounter simply because of the impact they make upon us. For this reason the senses must receive everything that presents itself whether it be useful or useless. The mind, however, has the power to turn itself away if it wishes, and readily fasten on what seems best. It is proper, then, that it pursue what is best, so that it may not only behold it but also be nourished by beholding it [...]. Our spiritual vision must be applied to such objects that by their

¹⁴ Elizabeth A. Castelli, *Imitating Paul: A Discourse of Power* (Louisville: John Knox, 1991), 15.

¹⁵ Ibid.

charm invite it to attain its proper good.” He continued, “Such objects are to be found in *virtuous deeds*; for these implant in those who search them out a zeal and yearning that leads to imitation. In other cases, admiration of the deed does not at once lead to an impulse to do it. Indeed, in many cases the contrary is true. We take delight in what is produced, but have no desire to imitate the one who produced it.” In other words, their actions generate no “ardor in the breast to imitate” their labor, “nor any buoyancy in the soul that arouses zealous impulses to do likewise. But virtue disposes a person so that as soon as one admires the works of virtue one strives to emulate those who performed them. The good things of fortune we love to possess and enjoy, those virtues we love to perform [...]. The good creates a stir of activity towards itself and implants at once in the spectator an impulse toward action.”¹⁶ Plutarch here captures what his culture viewed as a crucial structure in constructing their social lives in becoming the *humanitas*.

In documenting and writing about the lives of noble Greeks and Romans, Plutarch gave literary form to ideas and concepts that reached back into Greek antiquity and that continued to exercise a spell over moralists in the early empire. Likewise, Seneca, a Stoic philosopher and Plutarch’s contemporary wrote letters and moral essays that provide helpful glimpses of this ancient notion of imitation. In a letter to Lucilius, a youth he hoped to mold, Seneca wrote, “Plato, Aristotle, and the whole throng of sages [...] derived more benefit from the character than from the words of Socrates. The way is long if one follows precepts, but short and accommodating if one imitates examples.”¹⁷

Before Plutarch and Seneca, Aristotle had opined that the pursuit is indissolubly bound to deeds, that good actions are not simply the end toward which one strives, but the means to reach the goal. It is only through the repeated performance of good deeds that a virtuous life is possible. “We become just” says, Aristotle, “by doing just acts, temperate by doing temperate acts, brave by doing brave acts.”¹⁸ So, by the time Christianity made its appearance in the Roman Empire, the practice of biographical writing was well established.¹⁹ However, it appears that Christian hagiography did not emerge until the end of the third century, and that it only bloomed into an industry of sorts by the fifth century. There were tales of heroic men and women in both the apocryphal Acts of the Apostles as well as in the

¹⁶ Plutarch, *Life of Pericles* 1-4.

¹⁷ Seneca, *Epistulae* 66.

¹⁸ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1103b3.

¹⁹ Arnaldo Momigliano, *The Development of Greek Biography* (Cambridge, 1971).

canonical Acts. The early acts of the martyrs narrate the “deeds” of a martyr’s final hours or days.

The earliest Christian literature reveals that the vehicle of moral instruction is the *precept*.²⁰ The apostle Paul in one of his earliest writings says, “You know what precepts we gave you through the Lord Jesus. For this is the will of God your sanctification; that you abstain from unchastity [...] that no man transgress and wrong his brother” (1 Thess 4:2-6). Scattered throughout the New Testament are lists of precepts, some simple imperatives to refrain from “anger, wrath, malice, slander, foul talk,” and graceful and polished aphorisms constructed on the model of the book of Proverbs or the *Wisdom of Sirach*.

The precepts in the New Testament typically stand alone, but at times, we find them demonstrated through exemplars: Job as an example of “steadfastness” (James 5:11), Abraham the model of faith (Heb 11:8), and Elijah as evidence of the power of the prayer of the righteous (James 5:17). The book of Hebrews unfolds a roster of faithful people (Heb 11), Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Sarah, Moses, Rahab, and Gideon. Jesus, in the Gospels, recruited living persons as examples; a poor widow who offered a farthing, little children, Mary of Bethany, the centurion whose slave was at the point of death. Often, Jesus parables ended with the words “Go thou and do likewise.”

However, in these Christian writings, the faithful exemplars serve more as instances or “types” of particular virtues, than as iridescent models. Why are there no biographical narratives like those found in Plutarch’s or Seneca’s letters? The most obvious reason is that the Gospels stood in the way. Jesus says, according to John (13:15): “I have given you an example that you also should do as I have done.” The Apostle Paul said, “Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ” (1 Cor 11:1). The Christian Gospels (and the Epistles) are not biographies in the modern sense of the word. Rather, they are stories told in such a way as to evoke a certain image of Jesus for a particular audience. They convey a message about Jesus, about his significance to the audience and thus as a kind of preaching, or storytelling. Clement of Alexandria expressed it at the end of the second century: “Our tutor Jesus exemplifies the true life and trains the one who is in Christ [...]. He gives commands and embodies the commands that we might be able to accomplish them.”²¹

²⁰ On the parenetic tradition in early Christianity, see Wayne Meeks, *The Moral World of the First Christians* (Philadelphia, 1988).

²¹ Clement of Alexandria, *Paed.* 1.21.981-3.

Faithfully Christian

The great religions of the world are traditions of learning as well as of faith. This is not a coincidence or an accident. Memories (including individual memory) rest on the communal experience of those who surround us, not on the cloistered reminiscences of private persons. Likewise, traditions are sort of “created” memory that enshrined, legitimize, and form ways of life that echo deep within humanity. In the following paragraphs, I want to reflect on a way of looking at tradition through the lens of memory that has huge implications for our contemporary living.

Can we “do” imitation like the Greco-Roman *paideia* taught? Perhaps looking at the nascent Christian “faith” as an example may give us an idea. We live in a culture immersed in psychological jargon that sounds like faith language. These psychological jargons are too readily supplanted by a shriveled and subjective notion of faith. In a context such as ours, the term faith becomes associated to the act of believing in such a way the object of faith becomes almost irrelevant, as though it is the believing that counts, not what one believes in. Faith becomes self-legitimizing, impervious to examination, correction, or argument, and has its home in the private imaginings of the believer or in the sheltered world of religious communities.

Faith is only as good as its object. If the object of our faith is trustworthy, then it is reasonable to put our trust in it. A necessary component of faith is reason. The phrase reasonable faith was first used in the fourth century by Hilary of Poitiers to talk about Christian tradition and way of life. He opined that “Faith is akin to reason and accepts its aid.” He goes on to say that it can “rest with assurance, as on some peaceful watch-tower.”²² Faith for Hilary was not a subjective attitude or feeling but a reasoned conviction.

However, even a cursory reading of the church history will show that the charge of fideism caricatures the Christian intellectual tradition. Christianity has been charged with substituting authority and uncritical faith for reason, philosophy, and science. One of the reasons why the “faith” of popular culture has become divorced from reason is that, by laying stress on the attitude of the believer rather than on the truth of the thing believed, it is easier for people to negotiate our diverse and heterogeneous society. If faith is an affair of the believing subject and is self-authenticating, then it is easier for us to tolerate differences and live together in peace and harmony. An amiable pluralism offers a protected place for individuals and communities of whatever religious belief to practice their faith without external hindrance. However, there are dangers lurking within such principles. This form of

²² Hilary of Poitiers, *De Trinitate* 1.8.

religious peace has a price, for by acquiescing in a subjective notion of faith, religious people unwittingly empty faith of its cognitive character. When the object of faith becomes secondary to the act of believing, theology becomes a reflection on faith, rather than reasoned speech about God. Once the object of faith is abandoned, theology's object inevitably becomes human experience. Likewise, when talk of the good gives way to the language of values, we inevitably abandon the notion that some values are better than other, and that the *summum bonum* orders all lesser values.

As early as Origen of Alexandria, Christian thinkers claimed that their ideas should be judged by the "common notions" that are at work within the intellectual community. Nevertheless, Christian thinkers have also known that they were bearers of a tradition: "That which I have received, I have handed on to you," says St. Paul (1 Cor. 15:3). This tradition first exhibited first in the Scriptures, was later subjected to critical examination, tested in the lives of countless men and women, defended against its critics, and elaborated in myriad social and cultural settings.

It is not by accident that in many fields of creative work, immersion in tradition is the presupposition for excellence and originality. Without tradition, learning is arduous at best, impossible at worst. In most things in life, learning to speak, making a sculpture, playing the piano is by imitation, by letting someone else guide our movements until we learn to do the thing on our own. In other words, to do something well, we have to give ourselves over to it.

To repeat, reason, it seems, is found within rather than outside of things; for it is not an abstract quality that exists independently in the human mind. Thus, *Mimeses* as a concept means allowing one's hands to be guided by a master. It may be rather foolish to go it alone, as though one could learn to think critically or lead a group of people or a country or sculpt a statue by studying a set of instructions. The mark of rationality is to apprentice oneself to another rather than to strike out on one's own.

This apprenticeship applies especially to the intellectual life. The way we learn to think is by reading good thinkers and letting their thoughts form our thoughts. The first question for a Christian intellectual is not what should be believed or even what should one think but whom should one trust. Augustine gets to the heart of the matter in his book, *On True Religion*. He links the appeal to reason with trust in the community and authority. For Augustine, authority is not linked to offices and institutions and definitely not to vestiges of power. We think of submitting to authority or of obeying authority, and assume that authority has to do with the will, not with understanding.

Augustine, instead, traces a sense of authority that we don't often think about. He does this by going to the source, that is, to the *auctor* in *auctoritas*. This roughly translates as "author". *Auctor* can designate a magistrate, writer, witness, someone who is worthy of trust, a guarantor who attests to the truth of a statement, one who teaches or advises. Authority, understood in this way, has to do with trustworthiness, earned through receiving teaching with truthfulness. Stated a bit differently, to say we need authority is much the same as saying we need teachers, or that we need to become apprentices.

Augustine says, "Authority invites trust and prepares human beings for reason. Reason leads to understanding and knowledge. But reason is not entirely absent from authority, for we have got to consider whom we have to believe."²³ Augustine is not thinking of an authority that demands or commands or coerces, but of a truth that engenders confidence because of who tells it to us. As it turns out, authority resides in a person who by actions as well as words invites trust and confidence. In Augustine's model, authority is the relation of a teacher to a student, a master to a disciple, not a magistrate to a subject. The student's trust is won not simply by words but also by actions, by the kind of person the teacher is, that is, by character. Authority rests neither on external legitimization, nor on power but rather on trustworthiness, or on truth. This is the case because the purpose of authority is to clarify and illuminate, that is, to aid understanding, and its instrument is argument, not coercion.

(Christian) Memory within Communities

Religion is not a solitary business. The challenge is not only to keep the faith for ourselves, but also to hand those traditions on to the next generation. Only with difficulty and imagination can we transmit our experiences to those after us who feel, think, and act differently than we do. Religions are also living communities. They are the reservoir of memories of ancient traditions received from those who have gone before. As we have seen in this brief essay and more importantly in the market place of ideas, this memory of traditions and cultures is being replaced by reason and autonomous thinking. For example: unless a thinker is freed from the constraints of inherited beliefs and institutions, they cannot engage in the pursuit of free inquiry that leads to truth. In other words, reason is to be found only outside of tradition, outside of the collective memory. However, Christian thought has been

²³ Augustine, *De Vera Religione* xxiv.45 in *Augustine: Earlier Writings*, trans. John H. S. Burleigh, The Library of Christian Classics (Philadelphia, 1953).

a critical and rational enterprise, and at its best has welcomed the common notions at work within the intellectual community.

Christian thinking does not begin with general religious ideas or universal principles, but with a particular history that began in a tiny part of the world called Judea and extends across the generations and centuries in a stately procession of those who look to that light. The mystery that lies at the center of Christian faith following the concept of *mimeses*, is mediated and modelled by the men and women whose lives have been illumined by that light, languages, traditions and cultures. We cannot take the message out of the tradition or much less the context of the writers, their texts and their original audience. Although this makes the process of interpreting or contemporary identity-making more demanding, it is nevertheless a realization which sets us on the right path. Memories and *memises* came because of a particular people at a particular place and for a particular reason. Hence memories and *memises* are tricky business and they should be tended with care and reason.