



FINDING THE ONE JESUS THROUGH THE FOUR GOSPELS

W.C. Dobbs
Endowed
Lecture



Truett
Seminary

17th November
2016

Rev'd Canon Prof Richard Burridge, Dean of KCL

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Introduction:

- **Texts, windows and mirrors**
- A triangle of relationships in reading - the author, the text and the reader.
- A triangle of images of reading: windows, mirrors and stained glass.
- The quest for the historical Jesus - using the gospels as windows; criticism of sections.
- Modern literary approaches; reader response - using the gospels as mirrors. Stories as a whole.

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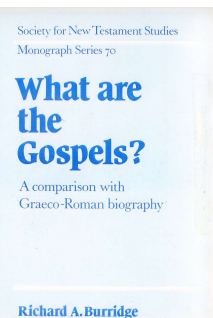
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1 Gospel Genre = Biography

1.a Genre Interpretation

- Read Classics at Oxford
- Taught at Sevenoaks
- St John's Nottingham
- Research to critique American biographical theories about gospels
- Continued in Bromley as curate & Exeter chaplain
- SNTS MS 70 1992 CUP



Society for New Testament Studies
Monograph Series 70



What are the Gospels?
A comparison with Graeco-Roman biography

Richard A. Burridge

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1 Gospel Genre = Biography



1.a Genre Interpretation

- 'What is a text or work?' = genre criticism
- Translation: *genre, gattung, species, genos*
- "Good evening, here is the news"
- "Once upon a time" – expect different story
- My interest in genre studies since Oxford
- Ancient theory – classification system
- Modern theory – more dynamic, flexible, birth, life, development & death of genres

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1 Gospel Genre = Biography



1.a Genre Interpretation

- Genre used in communication theory
- How do we decide a genre? – pigeonhole
- How do we produce a communication?
- A contract between author and audience
- How do we receive or interpret a text?
- Genres as dynamic, alive, developing
- 'More of a pigeon than pigeonhole'
- Genre theory as my first key contribution

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1 Gospel Genre = Biography

1.b Previous scholarship

- 19th century Romantic Lives of Jesus
- 1920's, Karl Ludwig Schmidt and Rudolf Bultmann; rise of Form Critical approaches concentrate on individual pericopae (**forms**) but gospels are *sui generis*, unique **genre**
- 'Myth' (legend?) v historicity – dichotomy
- Quest for Historical Jesus v 'Christ of faith'
- Impact on Christians' faith (eg Ratzinger)

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1 Gospel Genre = Biography
1.b Previous scholarship

- 1960's, rise of Redaction Criticism restores the evangelists as theologians and writers
- Questions of the gospels' overall genre start to be asked again, especially in the USA and in Britain, e.g. Graham N. Stanton: *Jesus of Nazareth in New Testament Preaching* (SNTS MS 27, CUP 1974)
- Charles Talbert's *What is a Gospel?* (1977)
- David E. Aune's reaction and later work

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1 Gospel Genre = Biography
1.c Rabbinic material

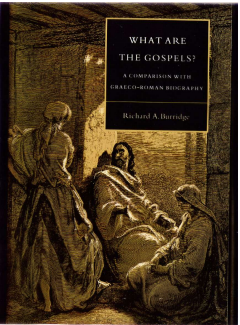
- Traditio-historical analysis often parallels gospel stories with Rabbinic anecdotes.
- Yet notable absence of Rabbinic biography: Alexander; Neuser.
- Most are anecdotes, more about teaching than action. Death of sage stories.
- Jesus as the centre v Torah at centre; Jesus and Hillel.

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1 Gospel Genre = Biography
1.d Genre Research

- Part One: Problem, tools, scholars, methodology
- Part Two: Comparison with Graeco-Roman Lives' generic features
- It demonstrated that the gospels have same features as ancient Lives
- Paperback edn in 1995

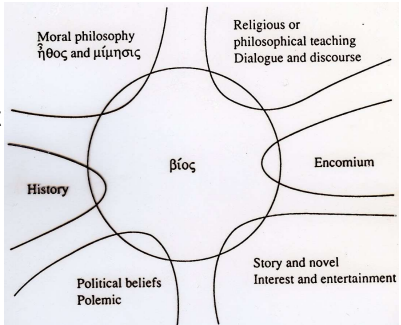


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1 Gospel Genre = Biography
1.d Genre Research

- Second contribution: the setting of wider ancient literature
- Relationship of ancient 'Lives' to neighbouring other works



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1 Gospel Genre = Biography
1.d Genre Research

- Bultmann and German scholarship compared the gospels with **modern** biography – very different (post Freud, Marx, etc); this is a **genre** mistake
- *Biographia*: First used in Photius (9th century), quoting Damascius' *Life of Isodorus* (5th century)
- *Bioi/Vitae*: Isocrates' *Evagoras*, Xenophon's *Agesilaus*, Satyrus' *Euripides*, Nepos' *Atticus*, Philo's *Moses*, Tacitus' *Agricola*, Plutarch's *Cato Minor*, Suetonius' *Lives of the Caesars*, Lucian's *Demonax* and Philostratus' *Apollonius of Tyana*, compared with the four canonical gospels.

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1 Gospel Genre = Biography
1.d Genre Research

- Use of 'family resemblance theory' (Wittgenstein) looking for shared features within group or family
- **External/Formal structure**: in continuous prose narrative, single scroll (10,000 – 20,000 words), having a bare chronological outline, with material inserted about the subject, arranged by topics.
- **Internal/Content**: ancestry, birth, public debut. Aims include apologetic, polemic or didactic. Speeches and actions, **deeds** and **words**. Concentration on detailed treatment of subject's death, often 20-25% - compare Passion narratives.

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1 Gospel Genre = Biography
1.d Genre Research

II: Content analysis of Xenophon's 'Agesilaus'

Chapters	Date (BC)	Topic	Percentage of work
I.1-5	444-397	Introduction and early years	4.0%
I.6-II.16	396-394	Persian campaign	37.4
II.17-II.31	394-360	Other campaigns and deeds	12.7
III-X		Individual virtues	35.2
XI		Summary	10.7

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1 Gospel Genre = Biography
1.d Genre Research

V: Content analysis of Tacitus' 'Agricola'

Chapters	Date (AD)	Lines	Percentage of work
1-3	-	50	5.6%
4-9	40-78	113	12.6
10-17	-	164	18.3
18-24	78-82	120	13.4
25-28	83	65	7.2
29-39	84	234	26.1
40-43	84-93	83	9.3
44-46	-	67	7.5

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1 Gospel Genre = Biography
1.d Genre Research

VI: Content analysis of Plutarch's 'Cato Minor'

Chapters	Date (BC)	Topic	Percentage of work
1-7	95-73	Birth, childhood and education	15.0%
8-15	72-66	Slave Wars, Military Tribune in Asia	9.2
16-21	66-65	Quaestor	10.3
22-29	64-63	Cicero Consul; Catilinarian Conspiracy	11.5
30-39	62-56	Pompey and Caesar; Cato in Cyprus	13.8
40-46	55-53	Praetorship	10.3
47-51	52-50	Growing tension	6.9
52-55	49-48	Civil War, Pharsalus	5.7
56-73	47/46	Last days in Africa, death	17.3

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1 Gospel Genre = Biography
1.d Genre Research

2 Allocation of space

X: Content analysis of Matthew's gospel

Chapters	Verses	Topic	Percentage of work
1-2	48	Prologue and infancy	4.5
3-4	42	Preparation and beginnings	3.9
5-7	111	Sermon on the Mount (Discourse)	10.4
8-9	72	Ministry	6.7
10-11 ¹	41	Mission of disciples (Discourse)	3.8
11 ² -12	79	Ministry and conflict	7.4
13 ¹⁻³²	52	Parables of the Kingdom (Discourse)	4.9
13 ³³ -17	136	Ministry and Peter's Confession	12.7
18	35	Christian community (Discourse)	3.3
19-23	195	Journey to Jerusalem	18.2
24-25	97	Eschatology (Discourse)	9.1
26-28	161	Last Supper, Passion and Resurrection	15.1
Totals:	1069		100.0%

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1 Gospel Genre = Biography
1.d Genre Research

XI: Content analysis of Mark's gospel

Chapters	Verses	Topic	Percentage of work
1 ¹⁻¹³	13	Preparation and beginnings	2.0
1 ¹⁴ -3 ⁶	66	Ministry in Galilee	9.9
3 ⁷ -6 ⁶	119	Call of disciples and ministry	17.9
6 ⁷ -8 ²⁶	113	Mission and blindness of disciples	17.0
8 ²⁷ -10	113	Journey to Jerusalem	17.0
11-13	114	Ministry in Jerusalem	17.1
14-16 ⁸	127	Last Supper, Passion and Resurrection	19.1
Totals:	665		100.0

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1 Gospel Genre = Biography
1.d Genre Research

XII: Content analysis of Luke's gospel

Chapters	Verses	Topic	Percentage of work
1 ¹⁻⁴	4	Preface	0.4
1 ⁵ -2	128	Infancy narratives	11.1
3-4 ¹³	51	Preparation and beginnings	4.4
4 ¹⁴ -9 ⁵⁰	275	Ministry in Galilee	23.9
9 ⁵¹ -19 ²⁷	406	Journey to Jerusalem	35.3
19 ²⁸ -21	106	Ministry in Jerusalem	9.3
22-24	179	Last Supper, Passion and Resurrection	15.6
Totals:	1149		100.0%

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1 Gospel Genre = Biography
1.d Genre Research

224 *The Fourth Gospel*

XIII: Content analysis of the Fourth Gospel

Chapters	Verses	Topic	Percentage of work
1 ¹ -1 ⁸	18	Prologue	2.0%
1 ⁹ -5 ¹	33	Beginnings and call of disciples	3.8
2-10	427	Ministry and Signs	48.6
11-12 ¹¹	68	Bethany	7.8
12 ¹² -5 ⁰	39	Entry into Jerusalem	4.5
13	38	Last Supper	4.3
14-17	117	Discourses	13.3
18-21	138	Passion and Resurrection	15.7
Totals:	878		100.0%

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1 Gospel Genre = Biography
1.d Genre Research

Homer's *Iliad* Computer analysis

Homer's *Odyssey* Computer analysis

Nominatives

- Iliad*: Hector 2.4%, Achilles 2%, Zeus 2%, Achaeans 1.9%, Agamemnon 1.2%, Athene 1.5%, Odysseus 0.9%, Menelaus 0.7%, Patroclus 0.5%
- Odyssey*: Odysseus 4.8%, Telemachus 1.9%, Athene 2.1%, Zeus 1.3%, Achaeans 0.6%, Menelaus 0.5%

Totals

- Iliad*: Hector 5.4%, Achilles 4.3%, Zeus 5.4%, Achaeans 7.4%, Agamemnon 2%, Athene 1.9%, Odysseus 1.5%, Menelaus 1.6%, Patroclus 1.9%
- Odyssey*: Odysseus 8.8%, Telemachus 3.6%, Athene 2.4%, Zeus 5.9%, Achaeans 1.9%, Menelaus 0.9%

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1 Gospel Genre = Biography
1.e Subject: Deeds & Words

Xenophon's *Agessilaus* Computer analysis

Plutarch's *Cato Minor* Computer analysis

Nominatives

- Agessilaus*: Agessilaus 9.5%, Persia/Persians 1.6%, Tissaphernes 1.4%, Greece/Greeks 0.8%
- Cato Minor*: Cato 14.9%, Pompey 3.1%, Caesar 2.7%, Scipio 1%, Cicero 1%, Menellus 0.9%, Clodius 0.6%, Caeppio 0.4%

Totals

- Agessilaus*: Agessilaus 18.7%, Greece/Greeks 10%, Sparta/Spartans 4.6%, Persia/Persians 4%, Tissaphernes 2.5%, Tissamenes 0.3%, Megabates 1%
- Cato Minor*: Cato 42.5%, Pompey 13.4%, Caesar 12.6%, Caeppio 1.2%, Menellus 1.9%, Clodius 2.4%, Menellus 2.3%, Cicero 3.1%, Scipio 3.9%

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1 Gospel Genre = Biography
1.e Subject: Deeds & Words

Satyrus' *Euripides* Manual analysis

- Computer analysis by noun endings
- Manual analysis counting subjects by hand
- Quarter **deeds** sixth **words**

Quotations 17.5%

Euripides 25.8%

Miscellaneous 45.2%

I/we 4.4%

Aristophanes 1.6%

Indefinite 5.5%

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1 Gospel Genre = Biography
1.e Subject: Deeds & Words

Mark's gospel Manual analysis

- Quarter for Jesus' **deeds**
- Fifth for Jesus' **words**
- 45% total
- Similar to Satyrus

Jesus' teaching 20.2%

Jesus 24.4%

Disciples 12.2%

Recipients 9.3%

Jewish leaders 5%

Impersonal 1.1%

Others 7%

God/Father 0.2%

Indefinite 9.3%

Miscellaneous 9.7%

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1 Gospel Genre = Biography
1.e Subject: Deeds & Words

Matthew's gospel Manual analysis

- Over 42%, a larger amount for **words** = effect of Q
- Deeds** over a sixth, 17%
- 60% in total of the verbs

Jesus' teaching 42.5%

Jesus 17.2%

Disciples 8.8%

Recipients 4.4%

Jewish leaders 4.4%

Others 8.1%

God/Father 0.6%

Indefinite 4.2%

Impersonal 0.9%

Miscellaneous 8.9%

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1 Gospel Genre = Biography
1.e Subject: Deeds & Words

Luke's gospel
Manual analysis

- Slightly less for **words**
- Slightly more for **deeds**
- Still way over half of total at 55%

Category	Percentage
Jesus' teaching	36.8%
Jesus	17.9%
Others	7.4%
God/Father	1.1%
Indefinite	7.3%
Miscellaneous	9.1%
Impersonal	1.7%
Jewish leaders	3.4%
Recipients	7%
Women disciples	1.1%
Disciples	7.2%

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1 Gospel Genre = Biography
1.e Subject: Deeds & Words

John's gospel
Manual analysis

- Over half 54% given to Jesus' words & deeds
- 10% spoken by Jesus about himself

Category	Percentage
Jesus' teaching	34%
Jesus	20.2%
Others	6%
Indefinite	7.4%
Miscellaneous	8.9%
God/Father	0.6%
Jewish leaders	2.4%
The Jews	3%
Recipients	6.4%
Disciples	9.3%
Titles	1.1%
Impersonal	0.7%
Jesus/self	9.4%
You (pl.) Jews	3.6%
You (pl.) disciples	3.7%
God/Father	3.7%
Spirit/Paraclete	0.7%
Miscellaneous	7.4%
Indefinite	5.5%

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1 Gospel Genre = Biography
1.f Conclusions & Reactions

- Sui generis* is a literary nonsense; knowing genre is crucial key for interpretation
- Gospels not myth/legend, nor history but share same genre as ancient biography
- Centrality of Jesus' **deeds** and **words**, his life and ministry, death and resurrection.
- I conclude that this biographical genre "has distinct hermeneutical implications for the gospel studies, reaffirming the centrality of the person of Jesus of Nazareth" (p. 251)

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1 Gospel Genre = Biography
1.f Conclusions & Reactions

- Against main scholarly consensus (=unique)
- Conference debates at BNTC, (I)SBL, USA, Ireland, UK in 1990s
- Second edition in 2004 with Foreword by Stanton
- New chapter on Reactions and Appendix on Rabbinic Biography

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1 Gospel Genre = Biography
1.f Conclusions & Reactions

- Now mainstream scholarly consensus view – gospels are in the genre of ancient biography
- Christological hermeneutic for interpretation
- Jesus' **deeds** and **words**, **life**, **death**, **resurrection**
- 'an immensely learned volume . . . a superb survey of the topic, but also breaks new ground in its nuanced reading of ancient texts and its literary model.' Jerome H. Neyrey, *CBQ* 55, April 1993, pp 361-3.
- 'a most impressive study, displaying masterly control of the discussion of modern literary theory as well as being at home in a wide range of classical literature'. Christopher Tuckett, *Theology* (1993), pp. 74-5.
- 'a truly astonishing tour de force – interdisciplinary biblical scholarship at its very best'. Mark W. G. Stibbe, *Biblical Interpretation* 1,3 (1993), pp. 380-81.

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1 Gospel Genre = Biography
1.f Conclusions & Reactions

- Narrative Christology and biographies of Jesus**
- The gospels are neither a clear glass window, nor a polished mirror;
- more like a piece of stained glass:
- Christology in narrative form, the story of Jesus.

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1 Gospel Genre = Biography

1.f Conclusions & Reactions

- Catholic interest
- Italian edition: *Che cosa sono i vangeli?*
- Paideia Editrice 2008
- Translated by Francesco De Nicola
- Barcelona Gospels Conference on 20th anniversary May 2012



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1 Gospel Genre = Biography

Ratzinger Symposium & Prize



- The opening key note address at 3-day event

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1 Gospel Genre = Biography

Ratzinger Symposium & Prize



- We debated the historical and Christological issues in the gospels and Ratzinger's books
- Receiving the Ratzinger Prize from the Pope

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1 Gospel Genre = Biography

Ratzinger Symposium & Prize

- Presenting *Four Gospels one Jesus?* to Pope Francis
- Citation: for "indissoluble connection of Jesus and the gospels."



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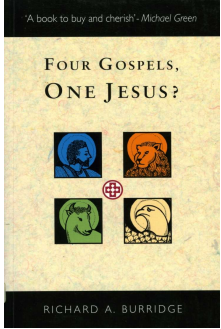
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2 Symbolic readings

Christological narrative

- Images of the four symbols of gospels
- Ezekiel 1; Rev 4
- Very early get applied to gospels; Irenaeus
- Research into use of images in Celtic art
- Used for the four story portraits of Jesus



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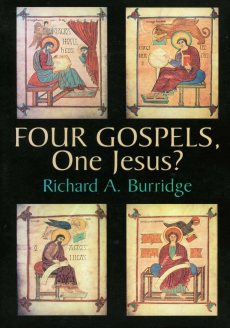
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2 Symbolic readings

Christological narrative

- Mark's lion, roaring and rushing about
- Matthew's human face, the teacher of Israel
- Luke's ox, universal bearer of burdens
- John's high-flying, all-seeing eagle – divine
- SPCK/Eerdmans 1994



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2 Symbolic readings Christological narrative

- Four gospels' portraits of the one Jesus
- Diversity and plurality within the canon
- Used for lay training across the church and colleges in USA & UK
- Updated edition 2005, Jackson's eagles & new NT work

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2 Symbolic readings Christological narrative

- 2013 Third US edition
- Four accounts of Jesus' deeds & words kept by church

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2 Symbolic readings

THE CASABLANCA CONFERENCE
British Official
Left to right: Admiral E. J. King, C-in-C, U.S. Navy; Mr. Churchill; President Roosevelt. Standing: Major-General Sir Hastings Ismay (2nd from left); Admiral Lord Louis Mountbatten (3rd from left); and Field-Marshal Sir John Dill (right)

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2 Symbolic readings

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2 Symbolic readings

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2 Symbolic readings




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2 Symbolic readings

- The four living creatures:
- Ezekiel 1,
- Revelation 4;
- Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.* III.11.8-9.

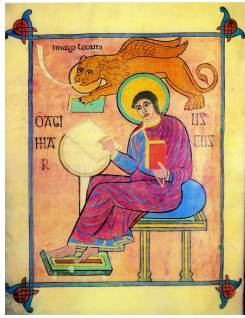


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2a The roar of Mark's lion

- **Mark's lion**, roaring and rushing about
- Mark 1.9. 'and immediately' 10x in chap.1, 40x overall.
- 151 uses of the historic present give vivid pace.
- Conflict in 1-8: Jesus' ministry despite rising opposition, 3.19b-35.

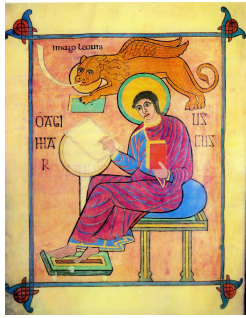


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2a The roar of Mark's lion

- The disciples in Mark, lack of understanding.
- Interlude of chapters 8-10 raises identity: what kind of creature is this?
- Jesus is the enigmatic wonder-worker; the eschatological prophet, the Messiah, Son of God and Son of Man.




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2a The roar of Mark's lion

- Jerusalem and the Temple (chaps 11-13).
- Jesus becomes passive, suffers and dies in dark desolation: 'my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' (Mk. 15.34).
- Even the ending is full of enigma, fear and awe (Mk. 16.1-8).




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2b Matthew's human face

- **Matthew's human face**, the teacher of Israel
- Mid 80's? Antioch?
- The opening chapters: Jewish background, genealogy and Joseph.
- Jesus is another Moses, who teaches from mountains (5.1)



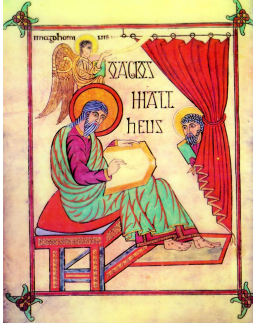
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2b Matthew's human face

- Jesus fulfils the law and the prophets.
- Teaching in five large blocks like Pentateuch, (5-7, 10, 13, 18, 24-25).
- Mission to 'the lost sheep of the house of Israel' (10.6),
- Opposition leads to the Church (18)



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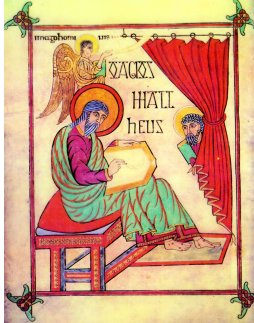
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2b Matthew's human face

- Woes to the leaders of Israel (23).
- Passion: awesome; additions Matt. 27.3-10, 17-25. Abandonment cry (27.51-54).
- Resurrection supernatural atmosphere: the division of Israel; (28.1-20).



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2c Luke's burden-bearing ox

- **Luke's ox**, universal bearer of burdens
- Luke's Preface (1.1-4); women and the lowly poor (1.5-2.52).
- Disciples include women (8.1-2), the seventy(-two) (10.1-16) enthusiastic crowds (12.1; 23.5).



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2c Luke's burden-bearing ox

- The disciples are better; Pharisees dine Jesus (7.36; 11.37; 14.1);
- opposition comes from the powerful religious leaders in Jerusalem.
- Jesus is concerned for the poor, the lost and unacceptable, outcasts, women and Gentiles.



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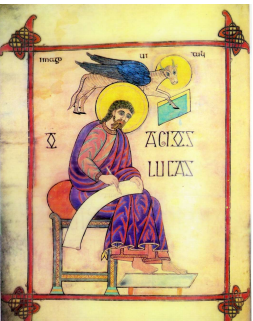
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2c Luke's burden-bearing ox

- Man of prayer (11.1-4) & the Holy Spirit (4.18).
- Passion: concerned for women (24.27-31); and forgiveness (23.34, 43).
- Resurrection: dines with friends (24.30, 35, 43);
- It ends 'in Jerusalem with great joy, in the Temple blessing God' (24.51-52).



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2d John's high-flying eagle

- **John's** high-flying, all-seeing **eagle** – divine
- Date: 90s? connection with Apostle John?
- John begins with Prologue (Jn. 1.1-18).
- Jesus is centre stage; 'signs' and discourse, the Son, equal (10.30), yet dependent (5.19).




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2d John's high-flying eagle

- Opposition from "the Jews" (2-12) = leaders
- Care of disciples (13-17)
- Passion: Jesus in control, (19.11), mother and disciple (19.26-27), 'it is accomplished' 19.30
- Resurrection: Mary (20.14), Thomas (20.26) Peter (21.15-19).

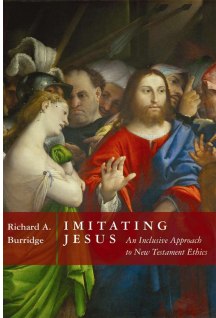


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2e Jesus & NT Ethics

- Attempt to take implications of genre for NT ethics seriously.
- First volume on ethical material found in the New Testament. Richard A. Burridge, *Imitating Jesus: An Inclusive Approach to New Testament Ethics* (Eerdmans: 2007).
- Second part: how the New Testament can be used in ethical dilemmas today. *Money, Sex, Power, Violence and the Meaning of Life: Following Jesus Today* (forthcoming)

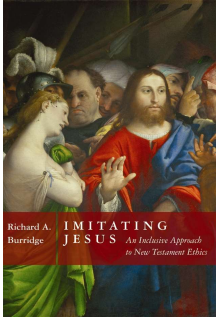


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2e Jesus & NT Ethics

- We must also take the gospels seriously as ancient biography.
- Must consider Jesus' ethical teaching *and* his practice.
- 'In the first book, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach' (Acts 1.1).
- Must include both his words and his deeds; a narrative approach.
- Allows for including his actions and following his example



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CONCLUSIONS

- The Gospels share the same generic features as ancient 'Lives', *bioi* or *vitae*, which are different from modern biography
- Must be interpreted through their primary focus on the life and ministry, teaching and activity, death and resurrection of Jesus.
- Gospels hold together Jesus' **words & deeds**
- Use the **four** different portraits of the **one** Jesus in preaching and teaching, through gospels' narrations of his story.

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CONCLUSIONS

- "This Christological hermeneutic which sees Jesus Christ as the key to the whole" (2007, Ratzinger/Benedict *Jesus of Nazareth*, p.xix)
- This biographical genre "has distinct hermeneutical implications for the gospel studies, reaffirming the centrality of the person of Jesus of Nazareth" (Richard Burridge, *What are the Gospels?*, 1992/2004, p. 251)

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FOR DISCUSSION

- **3a) Unity and Diversity**
- Use of **one** gospel as master narrative (e.g. Marcion) v. mixed 'harmonising' of all the four gospels (Tatian).
- The reading and use of the gospels in church liturgy and lectionaries. RCL.
- Critical study of isolated *pericopae* – contrast continuous reading of whole texts

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FOR DISCUSSION

- **3b) Diversity and History**
- His story v. History; the ancient idea of truth different from modern accounts of mere 'facts'
- the role of interpretation.
- **3c) Plurality within Limits**
- Are all portraits equally valid?
- Christology 'à la carte' in a consumer society?
- The four gospels as a 'stimulus and control' for our images of Jesus today – boundaries (R. Morgan, *Interpretation* 1979).

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FOR DISCUSSION




- **3d) Biography, Faith and Worship**
- Triangles: author, text and reader;
- story-teller, story and audience;
- preacher, message and congregation.
- Usual scholarly view - written by committees, for communities about concepts.
- The gospels as biography - written by people, for people about people.
- Need to read and hear the whole story in faith

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FINDING THE ONE JESUS THROUGH THE FOUR GOSPELS



FOUR GOSPELS, ONE JESUS? A SYMBOLIC READING

W.C. Dobbs Endowed Lecture

Truett Seminary

17th November 2016

THIRD EDITION RICHARD A. BURRIDGE



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