What Are the Gospels? A Comparison with Graeco-Roman Biography, Richard A. Burridge, Grand Rapids, Michigan/Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, second edition, 2004 (ISBN: 978-0802809711), xiv + 366 pp., Pb $35.00

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Few PhD theses can boast a paradigm shift within a field, but Burridge's '*What Are the Gospels? A Comparison with Graeco-Roman Biography*' could be numbered among the exceptions. Working under the supervision of Maurice Casey at Nottingham University (1983–1989) Burridge set out to question the long-held assumption that the Gospels were *sui generis* and as such were a class apart from any contemporaneous literary genres and produce 'a good foundation for the reintroduction of the biographical view of the gospels' (p. 3).

Part One consists of four chapters which outline the 'problem'. The first chapter, 'Historical Survey', sketches various scholarly opinions on the genre of the gospels from the nineteenth century onwards. Particular scholars, including Ernest Renan and C. W. Votaw, had at this time linked the gospels with the biographical genre. However, with the advent of form criticism and a focus on the 'oral transmission of the gospel tradition', the opposing view that the gospels were unlike any other contemporaneous literature prevailed. Investigations regarding authorial agendas and intentions were largely eclipsed at this time. The rise of interest in redactional-critical techniques, however, did encourage a new generation of scholarship to reexamine the biographical thesis in reference to Graeco-Roman examples of that genre. However, in his review of these works, Burridge notes that scholars did not operate with an adequate understanding of literary theory and genre analysis moreover they did not pay attention to the fluid progression of biography as a genre within the ancient world. These shortcomings set the agenda for Burridge's own treatment of the biographical hypothesis. He realized that if a 'gospels as biography' thesis was to stand, leave alone persuade, it must interact and engage with three main fields of enquiry: gospel studies, literary theory and contextual literary evidence from the time.

In Chapter 2 'Genre Criticism and Literary Theory', Burridge outlines the methodologies of genre criticism. An ample treatment of this by means of literary theory reveals that no genre can be totally unique, every type of literature is intimately connected and amalgamated with previous genre types, indeed the very understanding of such works by readers and auditors is predicated on the fact that they can themselves trace the genre and respond to material they encounter appropriately.

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Wittgenstein's concept of 'family resemblance' is utilized here to illustrate the connections between texts sharing a common 'generic' form and subject. Understanding and interpretation depend on genre recognition, otherwise communication is meaningless – a type of contract must be issued between author and reader/auditor in order for a text to be understood. On this foundation Burridge powerfully rebuts the view that the gospels were *sui generis*, to state such a claim is nonsense and systematically flawed in its comprehension of literary theory. Rather, in Burridge's opinion, the gospels needed to be contextualized and compared with literature of their own day to produce not mere modal or thematic connections, but rather establish their dominant generic conventions and style.

In Chapter 3, 'Genre Criticism and Graeco-Roman Biography', Burridge sets about constructing the development of *bioi* (lives) in the Graeco-Roman context. Incidentally *bios*, as opposed to biography, is the favored term throughout the text and is adopted to avoid anachronistic views of biographies formed by modern understandings. Burridge traces change and development within *bios* itself, also the various links it shares with other bodies of literature including history, novels, encomium, rhetoric and the like. He notes that it is most naturally found in those contexts in which particular groups have been formed around an inspirational individual. Moreover, the primary aims of such documents include teaching, polemic and often can be used in situations of conflict. This indicates the fluidity and adaptability of *bioi* within changing times and circumstances.

The fourth chapter, 'Evaluation of Recent Debate' revisits the biography thesis within New Testament studies and identifies the shortcomings of these studies. Graham Stanton, Charles Talbert, and Philip Shuler are commended for the work they have done in forging links between gospels and biographies but the many criticisms of their approach reveal that 'most proposals have failed because of problems in methodology or genre theory, as well as a lack of a proper understanding of classical literature' (p. 101).

Having documented the problem, Part Two outlines Burridge's 'Proposed Solution'. In Chapter 5 Burridge outlines 'generic features' which include opening features (title, opening words, prologue, or preface), subject (analysis of verb subject and allocation of space), external features (representation, metre, size, length, structure, sequence, and scale), and internal features (style, tone, mood, attitude, values, and quality of characterization). By way of this typology Burridge goes on in Chapters 6 and 7 to catalogue the generic features of ten Graeco-Roman *bioi* spanning from the fifth century BCE to the late Roman Empire. The central uniting factor of this literature is its focus on a single individual. The dominance of this individual is confirmed by the verbal dominance of them as subject. Each author is seen to present a

cacophony of anecdotes, stories, teaching material and speeches in order to narrate the life and deeds of the central character. Despite the commonalities shared by *bioi*, Burridge is also keen to acknowledge the overall degree of flexibility inherent within the genre.

Chapter 8 sees Burridge embarking on a comparison between the family resemblances identified in the ten *bioi* and the synoptic gospels. While flexibility and diversity is integral to the collection, nevertheless the synoptics can be placed without too much difficulty within a similar generic family as the Graeco-Roman lives. Luke's formal preface seems to align his work most closely with conventions common to *bioi*, but Mark and Matthew's naming of the central subject within the title formulae also aligns them with common biographical forms. Jesus' dominance as a central subject is confirmed (up to twenty-five percent of all verbs have Jesus as subject) and the inordinate amount of time devoted to the passion within these accounts is not heralded as anything wildly uncommon (indeed death and burial is often presented within *bioi*). External and internal features likewise confirm a family resemblance with the *bios* genre; however, the gospels probably derive from lower social strata than most surviving examples of the genre within Graeco-Roman literature. On this point, Burridge contends that *bioi* from different social levels may well have been historically produced but for one reason or another just did not survive.

Chapter 9 initiates a similar comparative project with the Gospel of John. This text too shares common resemblances with the *bios* genre. The text has a formal prologue, Jesus is the central verbal subject, the focus is firmly on Jesus' deeds and words and the didactic, polemical slant of the text has much in common with those *bioi* produced by philosophical schools.

In Chapter 10, which formed the conclusion of the first edition of the work (1992), Burridge reiterates his conclusions and poses possibilities that the biographical thesis lends to New Testament studies as a whole. Together the canonical gospels are heralded as 'Lives of Jesus', which posit him as the nexus of meaning; these are diametrically opposed to the noncanonical gospels which have, according to Burridge, 'lost the generic features of *bios*' (p. 250).

The book's first release in 1992 caused a notable stir within Gospel Studies and this second edition (which includes a foreword by Graham Stanton, updated references, a bibliography nearly double the size of the original edition and appendices) devotes a whole new chapter to 'Reactions and Developments' the book has stimulated since its first publication. Luke-Acts has been a particularly hotly debated text since the first publication of Burridge's work given its generic straddling of both biography and historiography. Much discussion has centered on the question of whether both these texts should be given the same generic classification or whether they should be seen as occupying

different generic frameworks. The recent debate regarding whether Luke and Acts were ever routinely read together as a unity in early Christian communities of course impacts directly on this issue. C. Kavin Rowe builds on Andrew Gregory's work on the patristic reception of Luke-Acts (2003) in his recent article 'History, Hermeneutics and the Unity of Luke-Acts' (2005). In some ways, he corroborates Burridge's proposal that the (fourfold) gospels are the best collection of texts generically in which to situate Luke, and that Acts was conceived by early readers as an entirely different genre of text, indeed there is no evidence of ancient copyists putting the texts together or indeed theologians reading them together as a unified work (in spite of what Luke's intentions for the two volumes may originally have been). He concludes, 'In the case of Luke's Gospel, this means that readings and studies of the Gospel itself, as with Matthew, Mark, or John, are entirely appropriate. Further, the evidence of early Christian readings would press us more towards studies of Luke in the context of other Gospel traditions than toward studies of Luke–Acts' (Rowe 2005:153).

Burridge also defends his thesis against the criticism that reference to Jewish biographies of rabbis, etc. could usefully have been included within the methodological framework. Indeed a later essay by Burridge, 'Gospel Genre, Christological Controversy and the Absence of Rabbinic Biography: Some Implications of the Biographical Hypothesis' (an essay originally published in the Festschrift for David Catchpole) sought to revisit this very question and is featured as an appendix within the second edition (along with pie charts which graphically represent statistics of his verb subject analysis).

Burridge gives a balanced synthesis of both positive and negative receptions of his work. He is right to believe that the Graeco-Roman biographical designation has become a near consensus in Gospel Studies; however, he is also quick to accept that on the face of it, the implications of his study for actual interpretation may well have appeared prosaic or in Tuckett's words 'true but trite' (cited on p. 256). In reality how does this generic classification make us read or understand these texts any differently? Burridge seeks to answer this with a fourfold list of 'implications and further developments'. The first implication that Burridge outlines is the Christological centrality of each of the gospels. Each character needs to be evaluated in reference to his relationship to the central character of Jesus. Burridge offers the example of the failing disciples in Mark: 'The point of each passage is to tell us *not* about the disciples, but about the biography's subject, namely Jesus of Nazareth, in this case, that he is someone who is hard to understand and tough to follow' (p. 290). In Burridge's book, *Four Gospels One Jesus* (1994), he would go on to illustrate the central images of Jesus presented in each gospel, as opposed to putting primary importance on the respective evangelists. The second area of

investigation outlined is 'the gospels in their social setting'. This second point, builds upon Richard Bauckham's volume, *The Gospels for All Christians* (1997), a collection that Burridge contributed to, which notes that the gospels were written for wider and more 'indefinite audiences than specific isolated groups' (Bauckham cited on p. 295). The conception of the gospels as *bioi* warns against too hastily drawing conclusions about a fixed, definite community which can be easily correlated with each gospel. For example, in Matthew's case, the gospel could more properly be understood as an apologetic or polemical document which defends a theological view to a much wider community, than a specific and particular 'Matthean' community. The third area of enquiry sees Burridge answering the question why there was an absence of references to rabbinic biography within his original book. A persuasive answer is given once again through the Christological focus. Namely gospels as *bioi* focus on the deeds and sayings of one individual; however, in rabbinic biographies, the sages are not the focus of attention. In Neusner's words 'sage-stories turn out not to tell about sages at all; they are stories about the Torah personified' (cited on p. 303). As a result Burridge concludes that the development from piecemeal fragments of knowledge about Jesus of Nazareth to a thoroughgoing biography belies not just a move from a Jewish to a Graeco-Roman environment, but also a huge Christological claim: 'writing a biography of Jesus implies the claim that not only is the Torah embodied, but that God himself is uniquely incarnated in this one life, death and resurrection' (p. 304). Finally the gospels' biographical narrative and ethical import is expounded as a fruitful area of debate. Many biographies taught virtue and vice through focusing on the protagonist's deeds and words. One cannot divorce Jesus' moral teachings from his moral actions. Biographies encouraged their readers/auditors to follow the central character's deeds and, as the gospels likewise beckon, to imitate and become like them. All too often ethics is posed as a teaching – 'do this' – which can in its bluntness exclude and marginalize. The biographical call to 'live like this' seems a much less exclusionary and dangerous ethical instrument and one that Burridge commends as relevant even in contemporary ethical debate. Of course, this theme becomes the center piece of Burridge's most recent and widely acclaimed book, *Imitating Jesus* (2007).

Though this book is largely theoretical, Burridge's thesis does not buckle under its own abstract weight. It stands as a clear, engaging, accessible, logical, and well-written exposition and defence of the biographical designation for the gospels. Defying critics who saw his thesis as adding little to our actual understanding of the gospels, he ably illustrates in this second edition how genre is not just about a classification or categorization but rather has profound implications for interpretation and meaning. Burridge's sensitive handling of literary theory

makes his readers well aware that they are in the business of dealing with abstractions not self-evident actuality. 'Genre' categorizations are in essence an analyst's construction; their true import is evidenced in their hermeneutical utility not reality.

One interesting question in this respect is the methodological selection of biographies within this work. This selection necessarily preceded the selection of features which these works were then proven to share as part of the same biographical generic family. The sample thus self-selects the conclusion. As in any enquiry, the selection of texts for descriptive purposes is not an innocent one. Justin Smith has, for example, recently shown how texts considered for example as encomium could actually be part of a broader familial genre of biography in that they often acclaim an individual's life and deeds (Smith 2007:190), though presumably these texts may well have initially been discounted from a biographical genre by an analyst. Taking this point even further Loveday Alexander has recently rejected the entire project of designating a preexistent genre in which to place the gospels for in her understanding these texts were produced in an era of profound change and transformation and may, in themselves, have played a key role in that transformative process. It is the gospels' status as active agents in literary development which she maintains is the main reason 'why it is so hard to pin them down' (Alexander 2006:30).

Another interesting question in relation to literary theory could be whether literary analysis of the generic categories shared by collections, anthologies (and canons) as well as the commitments of the given analysts toward the collections shed any light on conclusions concerning their genre. How does the canonical context of the four gospels impact, if at all, on the generic categorizations employed by analysts? Taking the question from a slightly different angle one could also question Burridge's selection of canonical gospels alone to posit as biographical and his outright dismissal of noncanonical gospels as occupying a totally different generic sphere. Indeed the fluidity of genres is itself an engine of cultural transformation and potential that may not exclude such a wide variety of texts as once assumed. It is of course true that those noncanonical accounts are very different in form and content to the canonical accounts, but variously they do focus on Jesus' early life, death, sayings, and deeds. While as Francis Watson (2006) maintains these texts may have been originally written to fill in the gaps of the canonical biographies those who undertook such projects no doubt felt they were contributing material which could be connected with biographical generic categories.

The role played by biographies in emerging social identities may also be a fruitful area for research. One point that is not developed by Burridge is the importance of Jesus standing metaphorically, especially in Matthew's Gospel, as a new Israel. Illana Pardes has recently imagined

the narration of national identity in her book *The Biography of Ancient Israel* (2000). There she argues that Israel the nation is imagined as a person. One could flip that insight round in relation to the gospels and say that here, a person (Jesus) is imagined as a metaphor for a whole new Israel (also variously a new temple and new high priest). The reconception of collective characters and national identities seems an important question to pursue in this respect. Pardes also outlines how many legendary and theoretical associations are drawn between the biographies of individual patriarchs (including Abraham and Moses) and the life story of the nation. Could this warn against too easily dismissing Jewish forms of biographical narratives in Burridge's project? Pardes shows how while Israel's collective biography may have been something of an exception in the Ancient Near East nonetheless in Greece and Rome narratives concerning origins of the people are more common. She writes, 'Israel's history bears resemblance to the Roman one. It too involves a divine promise, individuation from a major civilization, a quest for lost roots, a long journey to what is construed as the land of the forefathers, and a gory conquest' (Pardes 2000:5). The founding of the kingdom of God in Jesus' biography, likewise shares similar features to those outlined above. It may be a playful idea, but perhaps not entirely off track to initiate a comparative project which would place the gospels alongside literature that is united by a family resemblance of what could be called 'national/collective biographies'.

Another area of research which the biographical thesis lends itself to is the role of written biography in moral formation of later generations. Here the role that texts have to play in social memory is central. Burridge hints at this in his analysis of the polemical and apologetic response to the memory of Cato, which emerged following his death. Thomas Hägg and Philip Rousseau in *Greek Biography and Panegyric in Late Antiquity* (2000) have explored the role that the revival of the subject's memory in a later period by means of biographical texts (a process they call 'textual mobility') can be used to develop moral sensitivities and lay ownership on a person's memory, in settings distant from the original production. Although their work is concentrated on a later period, the main thrust of their argument could stand in reference to the first century Christians. For example Bauckham's thesis that gospels were texts for all Christians, could be corroborated by the link between biography and social memory. Namely such biographical genres could imaginatively transport diverse communities of readers to new and different places (geographically, socially, etc.) and in turn be used as part of a project in which Jesus could be literally re-membered in a wide variety of different contexts.

Justin Smith in his recent article 'Genre, Sub-Genre and Questions of Audience: A Proposed Typology for Greco-Roman Biography' (2007) also raises important questions about the different audience

relationships envisaged by Graeco-Roman lives. Some are written with a definitive audience in mind (ancient-definite) while others envisage a wider audience (ancient-indefinite). Some authors may write about a person in their living memory for a particular audience (contemporary definite) or for others distant from them (contemporary indefinite). Smith's typology of course has direct links with the debate initiated by Richard Bauckham in his recent book, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses* (2006). Therein, Bauckham argues that the gospels are legitimated by reference to a participant living voice, namely an eyewitness (in Smith's typology 'contemporary definite') to the events of Jesus' life. The link with oral history transmission is central for traditions do not tend to circulate anonymously but rather with the names attached of those who have personal memories of the events and who are known to the audience. Moreover this means that eyewitnesses in giving 'testimony' do not merely narrate 'facts' but rather interpret their experiences. In this respect the dichotomy between fact and faith is to a certain extent collapsed. In Bauckham's words, 'We need to recognise that, historically speaking, testimony is unique and uniquely valuable means of access to historical reality' (2006:5). Smith ends his article with the tantalizing invitation: 'what remain to be uncovered are the categories to which the canonical gospels belong and how this informs our reading of them' (Smith 2007:214). It would be interesting to see how far Burridge agrees with Bauckham's picture of oral testimony on which the gospels are based (in Smith's terms contemporary definite/indefinite) or whether in his experience the audience relationships envisaged by the gospels assimilate more easily with alternative categories of Graeco-Roman lives identified by Smith.

All in all, while the designation of the gospels as biography has almost single-handedly been established by the author of this masterful book, I suspect the subtler implications of the paradigm shift he has initiated will continue to be debated for many years to come.

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Response to Louise Lawrence
By The Revd Professor Richard A. Burridge
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I am extremely grateful to Dr Louise Lawrence for her review of the second edition of my book, *What Are the Gospels?* I had the privilege of teaching Dr Lawrence during her original undergraduate studies (interestingly, at around the time when the first edition of *What Are the Gospels?* appeared), and I have followed her later research and subsequent academic career with great interest and increasing admiration. The careful and detailed account she has written of my book, coupled with the incisive and interesting comments she makes about it are typical of what we have come to expect from her pen.

The first half of her article is a clear but thorough summary of the book, concentrating to begin with on the first ten chapters, which are substantially as in the original edition (CUP 1992), although somewhat updated for this second edition (Eerdmans 2004). This section of her review is mostly narrative, although Lawrence is to be congratulated both for the accuracy of her summaries, and for the way she has highlighted the important points of each chapter in turn.

Quite rightly, the bulk of the review article concentrates on the issues raised in the new and extensive final Chapter 11, which seeks to chart the reactions to the original book and subsequent developments in the continuing debate. Lawrence says little about the account of the decade following the first publication of the book: it was included partly to chart the reactions to the book and to give me a chance to respond to some of the points and criticisms made of the first edition. However, I continue to think that, in its own little way, it is an interesting case study of how the enormous enterprise which is New Testament scholarship goes about making what Lawrence began by calling 'a paradigm shift within a field'. It is a bit like getting an oil tanker to turn right in

twenty-five miles time by pulling on the steering wheel now! What this account shows is how the previous paradigm is first challenged through conference and seminar papers about a thesis, where the new ideas can be debated and discussed. This is followed by a wide range of reviews of the new book starting to appear in the various New Testament journals: from these it gradually becomes clear that, despite their various different comments and criticisms, none the less there is growing agreement that something new is developing and things are changing. The third stage is reached when larger books and monographs are published which take on board the new direction, and either dialogue with it or take it for granted as they seek to build upon it as the now accepted paradigm. I suppose the final stage will be reached when somebody else attempts a demolition job on it and proposes a whole new approach to the question – but fortunately for me, that does not seem to have happened yet!

The first main point picked up by Lawrence is the question of the genre of Luke-Acts, and whether one should assume the unity of the two books as one work and in one genre. She rightly draws attention to recent debate about how they were read in antiquity, with regard to the work of Andrew Gregory and Kavin Rowe. Rowe himself reflects the growing trend to treat them separately in his two books. While his *Early Narrative Christology: The Lord in the Gospel of Luke* (BZNW 139, Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2006; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009) concentrates upon the third gospel, his more recent *World Upside Down: Reading Acts in the Graeco-Roman Age* (Oxford University Press, 2009) treats Acts in its ancient context with little reference to Luke's gospel, nor, more significantly for our purposes here, to the question of the genre of Acts, preferring simply to refer to it as a 'narrative' or even as an apocalypse (see especially Chapter 5, pp. 139–176). I remain convinced that both issues of the genre of Acts and its relationship to Luke's gospel are still important, and see no reason currently to change my conclusions that the two volumes are related, but do not need to be of the same genre: if Luke fits into the genre of *bioi*, Acts can be understood as a monograph, one of the closest *genera proxima* to ancient biography (see Burridge, 2004, pp. 275–279).

This is related to Lawrence's later point about 'the methodological selection of biographies within this work'; she wonders whether 'the sample self-selects the conclusion'. This question would have greater validity if it could be shown that I have indeed selected works to fit my conclusions and even more so, if I had omitted or ignored other works which do not cohere with my results. However, the fact is that I deliberately included the main examples of writings which were either called or recognized as *bioi* or *vitae* (the use of the term 'biography' can be both anachronistic, since it only appears in the ninth century, and misleading, given modern concepts of biography which are different

from ancient Lives). The sample ranged across several centuries before and after the gospels, and I attempted an account of how this genre originated, developed and ultimately changed into later biography and hagiography (Burridge, 2004, pp. 67–77). Furthermore, I am not aware of any review or critique which has suggested other, different examples of ancient Lives which would change my overall conclusions about this genre, and how the gospels fit within it.

Lawrence draws attention to the interest of Justin Smith in other works such as encomium as 'part of a broader familial genre of biography'. At this point, I do think we have left *genre* behind, as properly defined, and have moved more into the level of *mode*, that is, referring to biographical tendencies rather than biography itself, to use Alastair Fowler's important distinctions (see Burridge, 2004, pp. 39–40). Lawrence also notes Loveday Alexander's suggestion that the gospels 'were produced in an era of profound change and transformation'. While agreeing and recognizing Alexander's enormous contribution to this whole area (as seen also in her collection, *Acts in its Ancient Literary Context: A Classicist Looks at the Acts of the Apostles*, LNTS 298, T&T Clark, 2005), such change and transformation is best accounted for by the flexible nature of genre at the time (see Burridge, 2004, pp. 62–66).

In between these points, Lawrence refers to my section on rabbinic biography, or rather the lack of it, and the inclusion of my article reprinted from David Catchpole's *Festschrift* (Burridge, 2004, Appendix II, pp. 322–340). I am grateful for this, not least because this attempt to relate the gospels to the significant absence of similar biographical accounts of other first-century rabbis seems not to have attracted much scholarly attention so far. Lawrence rightly notes my conclusion that writing an ancient *bios* implies a huge Christological claim about the way in which the person of Jesus himself is now seen as the ultimate revelation of God, rather than in the Torah, which the rabbis merely interpret and explain.

Lawrence goes on to consider other generic categories and the non-canonical gospels. While she is right that I do not consider these to be biographical, I do not think it is fair to describe this as 'outright dismissal'. As she agrees, these are 'very different in form and content' and therefore they must be of a different genre (which is determined by form and content). Rather than simply dismiss them, I suggest that they represent the tertiary stage of the biographical generic trajectory of the gospels, as the tradition moves into non-narrative collections of sayings or revelatory discourses of the risen Christ, legendary attempts to 'fill in the gaps of the canonical biographies', or, finally, the production of commentaries on the canonical gospels themselves (see Burridge 2004, pp. 240–243). This tentative suggestion seems to be borne out in more recent work, notably the final chapters to the *Festschrift* for Graham Stanton, *The Written Gospel*, ed. Markus Bockmuehl and Donald Hagner

(CUP 2005); see Christopher Tuckett, 'Forty other gospels', pp. 238–253; Ronald A. Piper, 'The One, the Four and the many', pp. 254–273; and Markus Bockmuehl, 'The making of gospel commentaries', pp. 274–295.

Next, the review considers the 'role played by biographies in emerging social identities', where Lawrence notes that I do not develop the importance of Jesus as a new Israel, especially for Matthew's gospel. It is true that this is only referred to briefly in *What Are the Gospels?* (p. 292), but I do develop it more extensively in my treatment of Matthew in my later *Four Gospels, One Jesus?* (2005, pp. 67–99). As for what Lawrence terms 'a playful idea' of 'national/collective biographies', that is precisely the suggestion I put forward as a possible way of understanding the genre of Acts, in comparison with Dicaearchus' biographical *Life of Greece* (See Burridge, 2004, pp. 238 and 277–278).

Even more important is what Lawrence refers to as 'the role of written biography in moral formation of later generations'. This is why the next major study which I undertook concentrated on the implications of the biographical hypothesis for New Testament ethics, eventually published as *Imitating Jesus: An Inclusive Approach to New Testament Ethics* (Eerdmans, 2007). Lawrence links my work to that of Richard Bauckham – and indeed both my *Imitating Jesus* and his *Jesus and the Eye-Witnesses* (Eerdmans 2006) were shortlisted together for the Michael Ramsey Prize, 2009. Lawrence asks whether I agree with Bauckham's picture of oral testimony: Bauckham has certainly given this old debate a renewed energy, but, however, much one accepts oral testimony behind the gospels, they are still written down in this biographical genre of ancient Lives, as Bauckham himself recognizes in various places (see Bauckham, 2006, pp. 220–221, 276, 279). Lawrence makes an important comment here about how 'Jesus could be literally re-membered in a wide variety of contexts'. I agree, and merely want to note how this is once again linked to moral formation in Allen Verhey's important book, *Remembering Jesus: Christian Community, Scripture and the Moral Life* (Eerdmans, 2002). As for Justin Smith's typology of the different audience relationships envisaged for Graeco-Roman lives, this again takes us back to Alastair Fowler's distinctions of mode, genre and subgenre (Burridge, 2004, pp. 39–40). While Smith's suggestions raise some interesting possibilities, I am yet to be convinced how easily different bioi can be so categorized, nor do I think that ancient writers would have recognized this taxonomy. None the less, now that Smith's doctoral research is reaching its completion, it will be interesting to see what debate it stirs up in the future.

Lawrence concludes her review article by returning to her opening comments that my book has 'established the designation of the gospels as biography'. While I am flattered by the suggestion that this has been done 'almost single-handedly', I must note that others such as Stanton,

Talbert and Aune (see Burridge, 2004, pp. 79–101) were also working in this field. It does seem that throughout the 1980s, the tide about the genre of the gospels was beginning to turn away from Bultmann's *sui generis* approach which was both theoretically nonsensical and hermeneutically useless. If my book in its original form helped to complete that, and in its revised version is now the new paradigm, it is because of the support and interest of so many others in the community of New Testament scholars, including Louise Lawrence herself. I am excited that she thinks that 'the subtler implications of the paradigm shift . . . will continue to be debated for many years to come'. I look forward to that future debate. However, I would like to conclude by noting how this all began with Graham Stanton's own PhD and SNTS monograph, *Jesus of Nazareth in New Testament Preaching* (CUP, 1974). Stanton was the external examiner of my own PhD thesis, and he recommended it for publication in the same SNTS monograph series; he also wrote a very generous Foreword to this revised edition being here discussed. So it is appropriate that I write this response on the eve of going to assist in leading his Memorial Service after his untimely death. If our future debates about Jesus and the gospels continue in the direction which he set for us, I am sure that they will always be fascinating and productive, whatever our paradigm.