What Are the Gospels? A Comparison with Graeco-Roman Biography by Richard A. Burridge (review)

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restraint, and fearfulness. V. states, "I argue that Job seeks a friend who will demonstrate courageous compassion throughout times of misfortune and loss" (pp. 139-40). Once again, advocacy is emphasized, and her reading of Job 42:7-8 suggests that the friends are criticized by God because they did not advocate for Job against God (p. 150).

Chapter 5 strikes me as a rather common narration of the moral imagination of the prose tale and its contrasts with the poetic middle. The ordered world of the prologue presents the virtues of patience, humility, and acquiescence. V. argues for an ancient, "heroic setting" of the Book of Job but a postexilic date of composition, in the sixth–fifth century B.C.E. (p. 189).

Chapter 6 is devoted to the Joban monologue in Job 29–31, especially chap. 29, where Job describes the good life. V. argues that this self-portrait "serves as an attempt to persuade his listeners to embody those character traits that he once demonstrated toward others" (p. 216) and to respond to him as friends. Though V. builds on Balentine's claim that friendship is the primary virtue in Job 29 (p. 213 n. 37), she underscores that Job's address to his audience is "implicit" (p. 217) and that "friendship is not a direct focus of Job's appeal" (p. 220). V. admits further, "Job's relationship with the various classes of persons he encounters would not, by Aristotelian standards, be defined as genuine friendship" (p. 218).

In chap. 7, V. follows John Barbour in understanding tragedy as a critique of virtue. It seems to me that in order to strengthen Job's connection to virtue, V. feels compelled to argue that Job is a tragedy, meant to cultivate pity and fear. Further, V. argues that Job's plot follows the themes of reversal, suffering, and recognition that Aristotle sees as central to tragedies. She considers the possibility that Job is a tragic hero but abandons it, arguing instead that God may be the book's tragic hero. Following this chapter is an appendix that considers whether God might fulfill the role of Job's friend. A short conclusion wraps up the book.

This work is learned, clear, and well written, and V. is keenly aware of the potential limitations of using virtue ethics as a hermeneutical lens for reading Job. One of the limits, as she notes, is that Aristotelian ethics cannot account for God as friend, as Israelite literature does (see p. 260). What if Job's counselors are attempting to be *God*'s friends as well as Job's friends? Must they always treat Job as their primary responsibility? Could not silent compliance and restraint actually be courageous in some circumstances? I am not fully persuaded that advocacy is the *summum bonum* of friendship or that Job's demands should be taken as authoritative over other characters. Nevertheless, V.'s work is an excellent contribution to a little-discussed topic, and interested readers will find it stimulating and challenging.

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RICHARD A. BURRIDGE, *What Are the Gospels? A Comparison with Graeco-Roman Biography* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2018). Pp. 524. $49.95.

They say "the third time's a charm," and that may be true of the third edition of Burridge's exceptional monograph on the formation of the four unique documents in the NT that we know as the "Gospels" (1st ed., 1992; 2nd rev. ed., 2004; the first edition was

reviewed by Jerome H. Neyrey in *CBQ* 55 [1993] 361-63). It is the culmination a twenty-five-year discussion concerning the exact genre of the Gospels. Are the documents "historical monographs," or "ancient biographies," neither, or both? In each edition, B. has made it clear that the identification of the genre of any piece of literature is key to a fuller understanding of the document itself. Genre identification has important hermeneutical implications and affects readers' responses and reactions to the text. Genre sets the tone, expectations, and context between the intent of the author(s) of the text, and the readers/recipient(s).

In a lengthy introductory chapter, therefore, B. reviews the extensive issues debated in the past concerning the genre of the Gospels and recapitulates his own position that the four Gospels are "ancient biographies" in the family of Greco-Roman *bioi (*"lives"). He covers key theories of the Acts genre, reactions from the Roman Catholic segment of scholarship, and grounds for future scholarship. Further, he demonstrates why his biographical theory is presently the most widely accepted view of the genre of the Gospels. Recent misunderstandings regarding the genre of the Gospels stem from a failure to understand the proper definition of genre and how it functions (p. 52).

Next, B. divides his book into two parts: he presents "The Problem" (chaps. 1–4), and then addresses the "Proposed Solution" (chaps. 5–11). Part 1 (chap. 1) begins with a "historical survey," focusing on nineteenth- and twentieth-century scholarship. The search for an overarching, specific "gospel genre" was undertaken for the purpose of aiding scholars in their understanding of the historical Jesus and of biblical literature. According to this view, the NT Gospels are distinctive and do not fit common forms of known literature. From this discussion the *sui generis* theory was born, suggesting that the Gospels are a totally unique form of literature and should be interpreted as such (p. 51). Scholars in the twentieth century employed tools of historical research and literary criticism to find the true nature of Jesus and the content of his message. At the close of the last century, scholars recognized that the Gospels are both literarily exceptional and similar to other known forms of literature: Jewish (or Semitic), and Hellenistic literature. B. evaluates the recent debate, citing numerous scholars on all sides of the issues.

In chaps. 6 and 7, B. outlines the internal and external features of both early and later Greco-Roman *bioi* ("biographies"). He analyzes literature that predated and postdated the NT Gospels, searching for similarities and distinctives. He carefully examines ten ancient literary works, concluding that "there is a family resemblance, yet the overall impression is of a diverse and flexible genre" (p. 184). Specifically, Mark's Gospel was plausibly the first Gospel document written, yet the author did not create a brand-new form of literature without a precedent. Both Matthew and Mark open with the name of the main character (Jesus), which was a common trait of the ancient biography. Luke presents a problem in terms of genre, because scholars correctly connect this Gospel with the Book of Acts; thus, is it a unique genre all its own? It is helpful to see how B. compares many features of the Synoptic Gospels, including their openings, verbal subject analysis, space, and characterization. In chap. 9, B. investigates the Fourth Gospel, which does share patterns with the Synoptics and reveals a "family resemblance" (p. 231). Clearly, all four Gospels include similar internal features; all four presentations of Jesus include "information, didactic, apologetic, and polemic" features that are "typical of Graeco-Roman *bioi*" (p. 232).

Furthermore, the noncanonical "Gospels," such as the *Gospel of Thomas*, feature no traditional Jewish narrative and are devoid of other aspects of a *bios*. They are neither the

"original text" from which the longer, canonical Gospels are derived, nor are the canonical texts "alterations" of some original "sayings" gospel. Finally, the NT Gospels were not written in a vacuum; each was written within a time, geographic place, and surrounding culture. Though thoroughly distinct from all other similar literature, all four Gospels reflect aspects of common Greco-Roman biographical literature.

Correctly, B. notes that it is improper to strictly categorize ancient writings by modern literary standards. We have had twenty-five years of discussion and deliberation concerning the Gospels' genre, and it appears that B. has written the most comprehensive tome on the debate. Scholarship could continue to debate this issue for another twenty-five years, still looking for a better or more descriptive term for the Gospels' genre, but what would be the cost of doing that? Numerous scholars and decades of scholarship have been unable to prove B.'s theory and his methodology erroneous. Instead, B. challenges scholars to continue with future studies based on the current developments and implications of the biographical genre. Indeed, B's book is so complete, competent, and convincing, reflecting his years of relevant research, that it is hard to argue with his clear explanations, charts, and added appendixes. In my opinion, it seems unlikely that anyone can improve on B.'s definitive words or his hypothesis in terms of identifying the type of literature we have in the Gospels.

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J. R. C. COUSLAND, *Holy Terror: Jesus in the Infancy Gospel of Thomas* (LNTS 560; London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2017). Pp. xi + 148. £76.50.

The last decade has witnessed a growing interest in early Christian apocryphal infancy Gospels. Cousland's monograph is a thorough study of one of these: the *Infancy Gospel of Thomas*, which deals with the childhood of Jesus. C. designates it *Paidika*, in accordance with several of the ancient manuscripts.

In the useful introductory chapter, C. agrees with the majority of scholars who place the work within a Greek-speaking, second-century setting, and he pays special attention to some contested areas, particularly the story's genre. C. describes it as a "parevangelical" work related to, but also independent of, the canonical Gospels in virtue of its being a rounded-off story in itself.

In chaps. 2–4, which form the bulk of the volume, C. focuses on the figure of Jesus, whom he describes as both a "holy terror" and a "benevolent son of God." In chap. 2, C. discusses the strange depiction of Jesus in the story. Here he helpfully systematizes the various attempts of scholars to come to terms with this, such as Jesus as a Jewish holy man; *Paidika* as a children's story or an anti-Christian document; and Jesus as a developing child. C. points in particular to many parallels to the special Jesus figure in the Greco-Roman religions, with their mythological stories and pandemonium. He argues that *Paidika*'s Jesus mirrors popular understandings of the Greco-Roman gods, with the gods often avenging human hubris far beyond the gravity of the actual transgressions. At the same time, *Paidika* also reflects a humor similar to that found in Greco-Roman descriptions of the gods.

In chap. 3, C. analyzes *Paidika*'s portrayal of Jesus as a child, emphasizing that both Jesus and his social milieu are described in ways that are true to life. At the same time, what