

word which he sent to the children of Israel, proclaiming good news of peace through Jesus Christ—he is Lord of all. You know what took place throughout all Judea, beginning from Galilee after baptism which John preaches. . . .”⁵⁷

G. N. Stanton has called attention to the interesting exegetical background of Peter's speech in vv. 36-43.⁵⁸ In it the story of Jesus is presented purely on the basis of quotations from Scripture: in order to speak successively of Jesus' mission, baptism, and Spirit-anointing, his works of healing, his death on the cross, his resurrection and appearances,⁵⁹ a midrash-like concatenation of Ps 107:20; Isa. 52:7 (Nah. 2:1 LXX); Isa. 61:1; Deut. 21:22 and Hos. 6:2 forms the main thread. This exegetical framework and narrative paradigm are certainly not in the first place Lucan but traditional. The presentation of the story of Jesus, in its outline, is strikingly similar to the Gospel of Mark and must, according to Acts 10:34, be especially linked with Peter. Especially of interest to us is the relation of Isa. 52:7 (Nah. 2:1) in v. 36 to God's own message of salvation and peace, which assumed historical form in the sending of Jesus Christ. In Rom. 10:15 Paul characteristically offered a different interpretation of Isa. 52:7 (Nah. 2:1 LXX). Here in Acts 10:36ff. the story of Jesus appears literally as the “gospel of God” and hence as fulfillment of the Scriptures. The connections with Mark 1:1, 14, 15 are obvious and must not be ignored in the story of the origin and intention of the use of “gospel” in Mark and the headings of the Gospels.

Stated positively: in Acts 10:36-43 (+ 15:7) we catch sight of the gospel (of Peter) which was just as much εὐαγγέλιον τοῦ Θεοῦ as that of Paul; it has connections with Paul's gospel and nevertheless makes a different use of the narrative of Jesus' history than Paul does in his Torah-critical teaching and preaching, which focused on the cross and resurrection of Jesus. Our (Petrine?) scheme presents a much stronger incentive for writing Gospels than Paul's. The Church needs both forms of proclamation to preserve, and ever to regain afresh, its identity as Church of Jesus Christ.

57. Op. cit. (see n. 56), 193. Schneider, op. cit. (n. 55), 75f. also agrees with Riesenfeld's proposal.

58. Op. cit. (see n. 55), 67-85, esp. 75.

59. Acts 10:41-43 then clearly shows the Lucan redaction of tradition. Cf. with Luke 24:30ff.,

The Gospel Genre

Robert Guelich

1. The Question of Genre

Much confusion surrounds the discussion of the Gospels from the standpoint of literary genre. Some of the confusion is endemic to the broader discipline of literary criticism itself. Not only does one look in vain for a precise, universally acceptable definition of genre but the function of genre within literary criticism appears to be multiple.¹

In the classical and neo-classical periods, genre had a *normative* function of setting the parameters within which one wrote and by which a text was critiqued. In modern literary criticism genre has a more *descriptive* than regulative function. For example, in the words of R. Warren and A. Wellek, the theory of genre offers a “principle of ordering” for classifying literature according to “specifically literary types of organization or structure.”² This usage of genre provides a means of identification and classification of literary works and periods. But even more recently, the discussion has focused on genre in its *interpretive* role as the means by which one comprehends a work. For example, E. D. Hirsch defines an “intrinsic genre” (the one germane to the text) as “. . . that sense of the whole by means of which an interpreter can correctly understand any part of its determinancy,”³ and F. Kermode more loosely describes a genre as “. . . a context of expectation, an ‘internal probability system’” that helps one comprehend a sentence, book, or life.⁴

1. W. Doty, “The concept of Genre in Literary Analysis,” in *Proceedings: Society of Biblical Literature*, 1972, II, 413-47.

2. R. Warren and A. Wellek, *Theory of Literature*, 3, 1977, 226. Further, “genre (is) a grouping of literary works based . . . upon outer form (specific meter or structure) and also upon inner form (attitude, tone, purpose. . . .)” (231).

3. E. D. Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation*, 1967, 86.

4. F. Kermode, *The Genesis of Secrecy: On the Interpretation of Narrative*, 1979, 162-63, n. 20.

Despite the many definitions of genre and seeking to avoid the pitfalls of the discussion, one can note certain features of genre relevant to the discussion of the Gospels that seem to reflect a consensus within literary criticism. First, genre has to do with a text as a whole, as a composite of specific traits or characteristics which are formal and material. In other words, the genre of a text consists of its literary structure and organization (the formal components) and of its content with various levels of possible meanings (the material components). Second, genre is a comparative or derivative concept. It has to do not only with the text in question but with other similar or dissimilar texts. As a category or classification (both explicitly for the critic who seeks to identify and classify and implicitly for the interpreter who reads a text in terms of the "sense of the whole") genre stems from one's conscious or unconscious observation of formally and materially similar or dissimilar texts. Therefore, a genre must consist of more than one text either as a category to which one assigns the text or as the "context of expectation" from which one interprets a text.

Within biblical criticism, not only does the quest of the Gospels' genre suffer from the lack of consensus within literary criticism about the nature and function of genre, but biblical criticism also adds its own terminological complications. At times, form criticism appears to use "form" and "genre" interchangeably.⁵ It is not unusual to hear references to the "form" (= Gattung) of the Gospels as well as references to the "genre" (= Gattung) of parables. Are "form" and "genre" interchangeable terms? Even more confusing, however, is the contention by many that the Gospels are *sui generis*. But how exclusive is *sui generis*—especially in view of contemporary hermeneutics, which defines genre as the "context of expectation" or the "sense of the whole" by which the text becomes intelligible? Where and how does one gain a sense of the whole without literary counterparts?

For the purposes of this paper, we shall use "genre" as a broad category to mean the text of the Gospels seen as a whole, a composite of numerous parts or "forms."⁶ Furthermore, genre refers to the work as a whole viewed in comparison with other literary works. To that extent, genre will function in this essay descriptively as the means of identifying and classifying the Gospels within their literary matrix. The natural consequence, however, of this descriptive task has definite interpretative implications, since a work's genre inherently qualifies its interpretation. Consequently, by classifying the Gospels according

5. K. Koch, *The Growth of the Biblical Tradition*, 1969, 3-6, who uses "Gattung" and "Form" interchangeably. The English translation does not use "genre" but alternates between "type" and "form" as the translation for *Gattung*. Cf. *Was ist Formgeschichte?* 1964, 3-6.

6. J. A. Baird, "Genre Analysis as a Method of Historical Criticism," in *Proceedings* (n. 1 above) II, 386-87, argues that since Gunkel, "Form" refers to the smaller, individual units of which a "genre" (*Gattung*), the work as a whole, is composed.

to genre, one qualifies their interpretation and in so doing uses genre in its more normative role which regulates what is appropriate and inappropriate to the genre (cf. the "gospels" of the Nag Hammadi codices).

But can one speak of a gospel genre? Four canonical Gospels, each with its own title as "The Gospel according to . . .," five works in the Nag Hammadi codices bearing the name "gospel,"⁷ and numerous apocryphal gospels from the second century⁸ all suggest the possibility of a gospel genre. A closer examination, however, reveals the distinctive form and content of the four canonical Gospels. Some find that only two of these actually qualify as "gospels"—Mark and John.⁹ And W. Marxsen has gone so far as to suggest that Mark alone qualifies as a gospel,¹⁰ a situation that would make the designation of one Gospel a "genre"—a contradiction in terms.¹¹ Is it possible then, as has been suggested, that the Gospels do not represent a distinct genre but carry a special label as "gospels" while belonging to another literary genre(s)?

Stated simply, therefore, our question is twofold: To what literary genre do the Gospels belong? and What bearing does the genre have for our understanding and interpretation of the Gospels?

2. Review of the Discussion

Numerous answers have been given to the question about the Gospels' genre.¹² But the variety of answers ultimately fall into two categories—one analogical, the other derivational. On the one hand, some have sought the Gospels' genre by aligning one or more Gospels with other literary genres. In other words, the Gospels find their analogy in other literature and belong to that literary genre. On the other hand, some, convinced that the Gospels are unique, *sui generis*, have sought to explain this distinctive genre in terms of how the gospel genre came into being.

7. The Gospel of Truth, Gospel of Thomas, Gospel of Philip, Gospel of the Egyptians, and Gospel of Mary (BGU 8502, 1).

8. See E. Hennecke and W. Schneemelcher, *New Testament Apocrypha* I, ET 1963.

9. E.g. J. M. Robinson, "On the Gattung of Mark (and John)," in *Jesus and Man's Hope*, ed. D. Buttrick, 1970, I, 99-129; idem, "The Johannine Trajectory," in *Trajectories Through Early Christianity*, 1971, 166-68. Cf. H. Koester, "One Jesus and Four Primitive Gospels," in *Trajectories*, 161-62.

10. W. Marxsen, *Mark the Evangelist*, 1969, 150, n. 106; see N. Perrin, "The Literary Gattung 'Gospel'—Some Observations," *ExpT* 82, 1970-71, 7.

11. Noted by Marxsen, *Mark*, 109 and R. Gundry, "Recent Investigations into the Literary Genre 'Gospel,'" in *New Dimensions in New Testament Study*, ed. R. Longenecker and M. C. Tenney, 1974, 114, but apparently overlooked by Perrin, "Gattung," 7.

12. See reviews in R. Gundry, "Investigations," 97-114; H. C. Kee, *Community of the New Age: Studies in Mark's Gospel*, 1977, 17-30; W. S. Vorster, *Was ist 'n Evangelie?* 1981; and P. L. Shuler, *A Genre for the Gospels: The Biographical Character of Matthew*, 1982, 1-23.

2.1 *Analogical*: Beginning with a review of the "analogical" approach, one may further divide these studies into three groupings. Some have found the gospel genre in (1) Semitic literature, others in (2) Hellenistic literature, and still others in the broader perspective of (3) literary criticism in general.¹³

2.1.1 Some recent treatments of Mark's Gospel, assumed to be the earliest Gospel in these cases, within the Semitic context have closely associated this work with *apocalyptic* thought and literature.¹⁴ While affirming the literary uniqueness of Mark,¹⁵ each has explained and interpreted Mark from an apocalyptic perspective. So much so that N. Perrin has actually stated that Mark is "essentially an apocalypse,"¹⁶ and W. Kelber has referred to the Gospel as an "apocalyptic vision."¹⁷ H. C. Kee, much more guarded,¹⁸ attributes Mark's approach to Scripture and the resultant self-understanding of his community and its role in God's purpose¹⁹ to the "eschatological exegesis" of Jewish prophetic-apocalyptic tradition. This background, with its concern for the eschatological "consummation of the divine purpose in history," the "confirmation of God's true agent through signs and wonders," and the "dogmatic conviction of apocalyptic literature that God's chosen agent must suffer" to bring about the New Age, helped Mark "shape the structure of the Gospel."²⁰

Since Mark obviously lacks many of the essential formal²¹ and material²² characteristics of an apocalypse, one could hardly classify it under that literary genre. None of the above mentioned actually assigns Mark to such a genre. Yet since genre also refers hermeneutically to how one interprets the work as seen as a whole and not simply to formal literary categories and since each of these noted above has interpreted the whole of Mark from such a context, the

13. This review does not purpose to be exhaustive regarding either the options suggested or the proponents of each. It intends simply to be representative of trends and scholars.

14. E.g. E. Marxsen, *Mark*; N. Perrin, "Gattung," 4-7; idem, *A Modern Pilgrimage in New Testament Christology*, 1974, 107; W. Kelber, "The History of the Kingdom in Mark—Aspects of Markan Eschatology," in *Proceedings* (n. 1 above) I, 86; idem, *The Kingdom in Mark: A New Place and Time*, 1974; H. C. Kee, *Community*, 64-67, 106-44.

15. E.g. Perrin, "Gattung," 4; *Christology*, 106-7. H. C. Kee, "Aretalogy and Gospel," *JBL* 92, 1973, 422; idem, *Community*, 30, follows A. Wilder: "(The gospel) is the only wholly new genre created by the Church and the author of Mark receives credit for it" (*The Language of the Gospel: Early Christian Rhetoric*, 1964).

16. "Historical Criticism, Literary Criticism and Hermeneutics: The Interpretation of the Parables of Jesus and the Gospel of Mark Today," *JR* 52, 1972, 365-66, 472.

17. "History," 86.

18. But note his rather infelicitous statement: "Written in a hagiographical style, like other apocalyptic writings, the Gospel of Mark . . ." *Community*, 76 (italics added).

19. *Community*, 49.

20. "Aretalogy," 422.

21. E.g. pseudonymity, bizarre use of vision and or symbols, farewell discourse, posture of narrating past events as though future prophecy, etc.

22. No evidence of sequential dualism between present evil age and future life to come, no accompanying pessimism or ethical passivity; rather a strong sense of the presence of the New Age in and through Jesus' ministry in the midst of the evil age.

avoidance of the generic label "apocalypse" becomes moot. They in actuality treat Mark as an apocalypse.²³ The validity of this interpretation, however, runs aground on the formal and material discontinuity of Mark with the apocalyptic genre.

Coming from an entirely different tack and disputing the apocalyptic reading of Mark's Gospel, D. Lührmann has suggested that Mark's Gospel depicts Jesus and his ministry in the genre of biography, but a particular form of biography, the "biography of a righteous person."²⁴ Aware of the negative reaction among biblical critics to the notion of biography, Lührmann, following K. Baltzer, distinguishes between an "ideal biography" and contemporary or Hellenistic biographies. The former, often seen in Jewish writings concerning the prophets,²⁵ accents the "typical" or representative aspects of the subject in contrast to the latter, which accent the specific distinguishing characteristics of the individual.²⁶ Lührmann, by noting the shift of the prophet or servant role in Isa. 42:1 to the role of the righteous one in Wis. 2:12-20 (cf. Mark 1:11) and by noting the application of the plight of the righteous, especially from the Psalms, to Jesus' passion, concludes that Mark has structured his tradition "biographically" as the "typical" or paradigmatic way of the righteous.²⁷ In so doing, Mark summons the reader to identify with Jesus portrayed as the exemplary, suffering righteous person.²⁸

Despite the strength of this thesis in recognizing the application of motifs from the suffering righteous in the Old Testament and intertestamental literature to Jesus' work in Mark, the parallels to such a precise literary genre do break down. Lührmann gives few characteristics of this genre apart from the exemplary suffering of a righteous person. But Mark differs considerably from the references in the Psalms and Wisdom to such a "biography." Rather than an anonymous figure whose exemplary life encourages others and calls for imitation, Mark's Gospel opens with a clear declaration of the subject's identity (1:1). In fact, the concrete, episodic rather than abstract, idealized character of Mark's narrative from beginning to end conflicts fundamentally with an "ideal biography." Furthermore, would such a genre sufficiently account for the word and works of Jesus and the significant, though debated, role of the disciples throughout the Gospel? Rather than a genre from which to interpret the parts, we seem to have a constituent part that has been inappropriately defined as the genre of the whole.

23. So D. Via's critique in *Kerygma and Comedy in the New Testament*, 1975, 78-90.

24. "Biographie des Gerechten als Evangelium," *WuD*, 1977, 23-50.

25. Lührmann takes his lead from the work of K. Baltzer, *Die Biographie des Propheten*, 1975.

26. Lührmann, "Biographie," 37. Consequently, the anonymous Servant of God in Isaiah serves as an example of such an "ideal biography."

27. *Ibid.*, 39.

28. *Ibid.*, 43-44.

Somewhat related to Lührmann's suggestion, E. Schweizer noted, almost in passing, that the Old Testament *historical works*, Jonah in particular, seem to offer the closest parallel to Mark's genre.²⁹ Baltzer goes further and includes Mark in his discussion of the biographies of the prophets,³⁰ and R. Brown hints at an analogy between Mark's account and the Elisha story.³¹ Yet none of these develops the analogy to the level of assigning Mark to a comparable Old Testament genre. By contrast, M. Kline³² has found the model for Mark's Gospel in the Exodus account and J. W. Bowman in the Passover *haggadah*.³³ Both, however, fail to establish the generic character of the respective Markan counterpart as well as the direct correspondence of Mark to any such model.³⁴ Consequently, Mark stands without a convincing generic parallel in Jewish literature.

2.1.2. Since Justin referred to the Gospels as "memoirs of the Apostles,"³⁵ the Gospels have been variously associated with the *biographical literature* of the Graeco-Roman world. Indeed, a "biographical" reading of the Gospels seems most natural even today for those who initially discover the Gospels. Certainly this perception underlay the nineteenth-century quests for the historical Jesus. And at a time when such a view of the Gospels was coming under severe attack in biblical criticism, C. H. Votaw wrote an extensive article in 1915 called "The Gospels and Contemporary Biographies."³⁶

Recognizing the diversity in the broader category of "biography" as a generic designation, Votaw distinguished between "popular biography" and "historical biography,"³⁷ concluding that the Gospels clearly fell short of the latter category. Rather they belonged to the "popular biographies," along with

29. *The Good News According to Mark*, n.d., 24.

30. *Biographie der Propheten*, 85-89.

31. "Jesus and Elisha," *Perspective* 12, 1971, 85-104.

32. M. G. Kline, "The Old Testament Origins of the Gospel Genre," *WTJ* 38, 1975, 1-27.

33. *The Gospel of Mark: The New Christian Jewish Passover Haggadah*, 1965.

34. Among other suggested "models" for the Gospels with roots in Jewish life and literature, one should note the calendrical approaches of P. Carrington, *The Primitive Christian Calendar: A Study in the Making of the Markan Gospel*, 1952, and more recently M. D. Goulder's work, *The Evangelist's Calendar: A Lectionary Explanation of the Development of Scripture*, 1974; see 199-201 for his brief excursus on Mark. These works are fraught with assumptions about Jewish-Christian relationships and the use of lectionaries and calendrical cycles, apart from the fact that they hardly offer a sufficient generic explanation for the Gospels of Mark and Matthew, not to mention John.

35. There have been numerous references to this designation in his *Dialogue with Trypho*, 99-107. T. Zahn, in particular, develops this memoir analogy in *Geschichte des Neutestamentlichen Kanons*, 1889, I, 463-76.

36. Originally published in *American Journal of Theology* 19, 1915, 45-73 and republished as *The Gospels and Contemporary Biographies in the Graeco-Roman World*, 1970.

37. Popular biography consists of "... memorabilia of a man's life, disconnected incidents and sayings without adequate chronology and connection, without showing his genetic relation to and his influences upon his times." Historical biography "... presents a man's life with fair completeness, order, accuracy out of an adequate knowledge of the facts" (*Biographies*, 7).

such works as Arrian's *Discourses of Epictetus*, Philostratus's *Life of Apollonius of Tyana*, Plato's *Dialogues*, and Xenophon's *Memorabilia* with which Votaw compared the Gospels. For him the common motif was the "message of each man (which) was the primary interest and value, together with the personality of the man behind the message."³⁸

Often overlooked in the references to Votaw's work is his clear description of the Gospels' special character in contrast to the very documents with which he was comparing them. He repeatedly labels the Gospels "religious tracts intended to promote the Christian movement,"³⁹ "propagandist media,"⁴⁰ "propagandist writings of the early Christian movement" that "contain historical reminiscences, or memorabilia, of Jesus' ministry,"⁴¹ and "evangelistic tracts" to commend Jesus as "Christ, Lord, Savior and Teacher to the Mediterranean world."⁴² Only by so broadly defining biography as a work about persons and their message could one gather "propagandist writings," the *Discourses* of Epictetus, and Plato's early *Dialogues* under the same literary genre.

One does not need to rehearse the lasting critique of this position voiced by K. L. Schmidt⁴³ and echoed by R. Bultmann⁴⁴ and G. Bornkamm.⁴⁵ But C. H. Talbert has recently returned to Votaw's thesis and attempted to establish it.⁴⁶ Rather than using the results of contemporary classical philology and the developments in biblical criticism over the past fifty years, Talbert sought to demonstrate the biographical genre of the Gospels simply by refuting Bultmann's threefold argument against the possibility.⁴⁷ Unfortunately, Talbert falls into the trap of assuming that a refutation of Bultmann's arguments leads to the confirmation of the Gospels as biographies. Countering Bultmann's arguments, even if successfully done,⁴⁸ may simply say more about the weakness of Bultmann's critique than about the validity of the Gospels being biographies.

38. *Ibid.*, 11.

39. *Ibid.*, 1.

40. *Ibid.*, 2.

41. *Ibid.*, 3.

42. *Ibid.*, 4.

43. K. L. Schmidt, "Die Stellung der Evangelien in der allgemeinen Literaturgeschichte," in *EYKAPITHTHPION: Studien zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments*, Festschrift H. Gunkel, ed. H. Schmidt, 1923, 50-134.

44. *RGG*² II, 418-22, in English = *Twentieth-Century Theology in the Making*, 1971, I, 86-92; *History of the Synoptic Tradition*, 1963, 373-74.

45. *RGG*³ II, 750.

46. *What is a Gospel: The Genre of the Canonical Gospels*, 1977.

47. Simply stated by Talbert: "1) The gospels are mythical, the Graeco-Roman biographies are not; 2) the gospels are cultic, the Graeco-Roman biographies are not; 3) while the gospels emerge from a community with a world-negating outlook, the literary biographies are produced by and for a world-affirming people," *Gospel*, 2.

48. See D. Aune's critical review of Talbert's work: "The Problem of the Genre of the Gospels: A Critique of C. H. Talbert's *What is a Gospel?*" in *Gospel Perspectives: Studies of History and Tradition in the Four Gospels*, ed. R. T. France and D. Wenham, 1981, 9-60.

In other words, showing that ancient biographies were at times "mythical" and "cultic" and arguing the similarity of the Gospels' attitude toward this world to the attitude of Graeco-Roman biographies does little to define the genre of biography.

P. L. Shuler⁴⁹ has recently followed Talbert's lead in tracing the gospel genre to Graeco-Roman biography and has sought, in contrast to Talbert, to delineate that genre more precisely. Finding evidence for a particular "type of *bios* literature, the primary purpose of which was to praise," implicit in the discussion of "history" and "biography"⁵⁰ of Polybius (*Hist.* 10.21.8), Cicero (*Epist. ad Fam.* 5.12.3), Lucian (*How to Write History* 7), and Cornelius Nepos (*Pelopidas* 16.1.1), Shuler calls this literary type more generally a "laudatory biography."⁵¹ He concludes that it relates more specifically to the rhetorical genre known as "encomium."⁵² This genre, according to Shuler, serves a laudatory purpose by accentuating the person and emphasizing his or her character or merit through selective use of virtues, deeds, exploits, sayings, and/or teaching. Among the literary techniques used in this genre, "amplification" (or exaggeration) and "comparison" stand out as tools for portraying the subject. After briefly examining several examples of this genre,⁵³ Shuler then applies this genre to Matthew's Gospel.⁵⁴

Matthew opens with a "literary procedure" common to the encomium genre. In 1:1-4:11, the evangelist defines Jesus' identity and gives signs of future greatness by including "... the illustrious lineage of Jesus through his earthly father, his miraculous birth, his upright earthly father, the time and place of his birth, his escape from death as an infant, and his home town—'topoi'... accented by dreams, stellar illumination, and the adoration of the child."⁵⁵ The evangelist concludes by accepting the importance of Jesus' death, his innocence, and the sinister behavior of his enemies and includes several supernatural events surrounding Jesus' death and resurrection.⁵⁶ Furthermore, the evangelist uses the techniques of "amplification" in the progressive revelation of Jesus' identity at the outset and the use of the supernatural events and dreams in both the birth and death narratives. The "comparison" technique comes into play especially with reference to the Baptist and in the contrast between Jesus and his opponents drawn throughout the Gospel.

Assuming that Shuler has successfully delineated a genre of "laudatory

49. *A Genre for the Gospels: The Biographical Character of Matthew*, 1982.

50. *Ibid.*, 37.

51. *Ibid.*, 45.

52. *Ibid.*, 85.

53. *Ibid.*, 58-87.

54. *Ibid.*, 88-106.

55. *Ibid.*, 94.

56. *Ibid.*, 96-97.

biography" similar in character to the encomium,⁵⁷ he still encounters the problem of a "rose by any other name." To be sure, Matthew does open with a series of narratives filled with the miraculous that serves to identify Jesus, close with an account of Jesus' death and resurrection that underscores his innocence and the injustice of his accusers, and heightens the account with supernatural events and dreams. But does all this make the product an encomium—a "laudatory biography"? Did the evangelist intend⁵⁸ to write a "laudatory biography," as explicitly indicated by Isocrates, Xenophon, Philo, Lucian, and Philostratus in their respective works, as noted by Shuler?⁵⁹ If so, why then the anonymity of the Gospel, the absence of stated intention, and the stark contrast in the way it reads from any of the examples cited?⁶⁰ In short, does the evangelist view his task to write a "biography" or to set forth the Christian message about what God was doing in and through Jesus Messiah? Is the ultimate focus not on God rather than on Jesus, as seen by the evangelist's deliberate use of the fulfillment motif, the infancy narrative, the baptism and temptation accounts, the "will of God" set forth in the Sermon (chs. 5-7), the mission of the "Kingdom" (ch. 10), the message of the "kingdom" (ch. 13), the "supernatural" events surrounding the passion and resurrection, and the final commission that identifies the work of the Son with the Father (28:18-20)?

To the extent that the Gospels do center around a person, Jesus and his ministry, they share a "biographical" element with the broad category of "biographical" literature then and since. But the great diversity within this category of "biographical" literature both in antiquity and in modern times has precluded any genuine precision in using "biography" as a generic designation. Thus Shuler's attempt at precision by his use of encomium or laudatory biography is commendable though futile. While perhaps delineating a specific genre of "laudatory biography," he has not succeeded at demonstrating that Matthew or the Gospels fall under that genre.

One is still faced with the reality of the Gospels as anonymous documents composed of various traditional units and literary forms whose language and style, in the words of Votaw, were "of the people, by the people and for the

57. See, however, the article in the present volume by A. Dible, "Die Evangelien und die griechische Biographie."

58. Shuler contends that "authorial intent" is "fundamental to genre identification" (*Genre*, 32-34).

59. *Ibid.*, 58-87.

60. Whereas the examples from Isocrates, Xenophon, Philo, Lucian, and Philostratus cited by Shuler reflect considerable diversity among themselves, none stands apart from the rest to the extent that Matthew's Gospel does. Granting the flexible character of a genre, one must still question whether the first-century reader would have "understood" Matthew in terms of an "encomium biography." Furthermore, Aune's critique noted above (n. 48) applies as well to Shuler's work.

people"⁶¹ in contrast to the "literature" of biography. Were they, after all, "evangelistic tracts" or "popular biography"?

Much more enthusiasm and perhaps potential for analogy has surrounded the suggestion that the Gospels belonged to the genre of *aretalogy*, a special form of Hellenistic biography.⁶² M. Smith summarizes this alternative by noting that "many accounts of ancient 'divine men' are variants of a recognizable aretalogical form" and "the Gospels are more similar to these accounts than to any other ancient non-Christian works we know of."⁶³ Yet Smith himself concedes that no Gospel, as we know them, follows this "aretalogical form."⁶⁴ Mark, whose first half may represent the remnants of such an aretalogy with its miracles that follow Jesus' becoming God's Son at the baptism and culminating in the glorification at the transfiguration, has, according to Smith, expanded and given a Judaizing reinterpretation to this "primitive aretalogy."⁶⁵

Others have more or less shared Smith's view in attributing at least part of Mark and John to such a genre and have interpreted Mark and John to have been written to counter the christological "heresy" of a θεῖος ἀνὴρ type. Thus while Mark and John may not be aretalogies themselves, they are the direct result of such, having incorporated and reworked such a genre as a correction of a false christology. Consequently, the aretalogy becomes a formative factor in the development of the Gospel genre of Mark and John.⁶⁶

One might be tempted to leave the matter with this conjecture, since none of the Gospels represents in final form an aretalogy. But one cannot leave the discussion without also noting the serious question that Kee has raised not only about the ambiguity of the term aretalogy, but even about the very existence of such a defined literary genre.⁶⁷ Furthermore, the presence of miracle stories or even a collection of miracle stories need not in itself indicate the presence of an aretalogy, unless one so dilutes the term as to mean merely a collection of

61. Votaw, *Biographies*, 2.

62. M. Hadas and M. Smith, *Heroes and Gods: Spiritual Biographies in Antiquity*, 1965; M. Smith, "Prolegomena to a Discussion of Aretalogies, Divine Men, the Gospels and Jesus," *JBL* 90, 1971, 74-99.

63. "Prolegomena," 196.

64. *Ibid.*, 197.

65. *Ibid.*, 198.

66. E. J. Robinson, "The Problem of History in Mark, Reconsidered," *USQR* 20, 1965, 136-37; *idem*, "The Johannine Trajectory," in *Trajectories*, 266-68; H. Koester, "One Jesus and Four Primitive Gospels," in *Trajectories*, 187-93; L. E. Keck, "Mark 3:7-12 and Mark's Christology," *JBL* 84, 1965, 341-58; P. Achtemeier, "Towards the Isolation of Pre-Markan Miracle Catenae," *JBL* 89, 1970, 265-91. Cf. S. Schulz's similar thesis about the "lives" of "divine men" behind the Gospels in TU 87, 1964. W. Schmithals, *Das Evangelium nach Markus*, 1979, I, 45-46, suggests that the narrator of the Grundschrift followed "die Gestalt einer biographischen Aretalogie." T. Weeden's thesis posits such a christology serving as a foil for Mark's Gospel in *Mark—Traditions in Conflict*, 1971, although he makes no explicit mention of an aretalogy.

67. *Community*, 17-18 and "Aretalogy," 402-22; so also D. Tiede, *The Charismatic Figure as Miracle Worker*, SBLDS 1, 1972.

miracle stories.⁶⁸ The Old Testament and rabbinic miracle stories give ample illustration of such collections. And the function of the Marcan and Johannine miracle stories is much too debated to conclude that they either reflect an aretalogy or a θεῖος ἀνὴρ christology.⁶⁹ D. Tiede's study underscores the danger of indiscriminately grouping together miracle stories, aretalogies, and the "divine man" concepts of the ancient world⁷⁰ in view of the great variety within each category.

Other Graeco-Roman literary genres have been suggested as possible models for the Gospels, such as the *Socratic dialogues*,⁷¹ *Greek tragedy*,⁷² *chiriae*,⁷³ and *apothegms*.⁷⁴ Yet none of these has proven an adequate explanation for either the form or content of the New Testament Gospels, and they have little consequence in determining the Gospels' genre. Thus one looks in vain to

68. So M. Smith, "Prolegomena," 176-77; Robinson, "Gaitung," 103; Kee, "Aretalogy," 409.

69. See C. R. Holladay's work, *Theios Aner in Hellenistic Judaism*, 1974, where study of Josephus's, Philo's, and Artapanus's use of θεός, θεῖος, and θεῖος ἀνὴρ reflects a great range of functions. Furthermore, Holladay concludes that the miracle stories in Hellenistic Judaism stand in the tradition of Old Testament salvation history, which attributed the special powers to God rather than any "miracle worker."

70. D. L. Tiede, *Charismatic Figure*.

71. E. G. D. L. Barr, *Toward a Definition of the Gospel Genre: A Generic Analysis and Comparison of the Synoptic Gospels and the Socratic Dialogues by Means of Aristotle's Theory of Tragedy*, dissertation, 1974, who concludes that the Gospels more closely approximate Plato's early dialogues, though not sufficiently to call them generically the same, than Greek tragedies.

72. E. G. E. W. Busch, "Tragic Action in the Second Gospel," *JR* 11, 1931, 346-58; C. Beach, *The Gospel of Mark*, 1959. Both back away from arguing that Mark used Greek tragedy as a genre because of differences in style and setting that precluded Mark's familiarity with such literature. G. Bilezikian, *The Liberated Gospel: A Comparison of the Gospel of Mark and Greek Tragedy*, 1977, however, disputes that view by showing how accessible Greek tragedy was to Mark's world (33-50). He argues for Mark's use of the genre by using Aristotle's six essential criteria for tragedy drawn from the *Poetics*, the very criteria that led Barr, *Definition*, to place the Gospels closer to Plato's *Dialogues*. In any event, such a genre reduces the Gospels to that of a "passion play" or, in more familiar terms, a passion narrative with an extended introduction.

73. This term refers to a technical form used in classical rhetoric whose meaning and usage were quite fluid. See Kürzinger, "Die Aussage des Papias von Hierapolis zur literarischen Form des Markusevangelium," *BZ* 21, 1977, 245-64; H. Fischel, "Story and History: Observations on Graeco-Roman Rhetoric and Pharisaism," *American Oriental Society: Middle West Branch Semi-Centennial Volume*, 1969, 59-88; *idem*, "Studies in Cynicism and the Ancient Near East: The Transformation of a Chria," in *Religions in Antiquity*, ed. J. Neusner, 1968, 372-411 (these articles cited by Kee in *Community*, 184, n. 62); and Kee, *Community*, 22-23. Kürzinger notes that the form may extend from a statement about a person or analogy focusing on a saying or action by the person to a more extended narrative consisting of a saying, action, or both ("Aussage," 256-57). To this extent it corresponds to such literary forms as an apothegm, apomnemoneuma, gnome, or aphorism. According to Kürzinger, Papias (Eusebius, *HE* 3.39.15-16) had such a rhetorical meaning in mind when he wrote that Peter gave the Lord's teachings *ᾠδὴς καὶ χεῖρας* ("in the manner or form of chriae"). This form may apply, as Papias suggests, to the pericopes of Jesus' words and deeds but hardly suffices as a genre that includes the extended passion narrative.

74. J. A. Baird, "Genre Analysis" (n. 6 above), 399, suggests in passing an "extended apothegm." Fortunately, he does not attempt the impossible and explain how such a form could be "expanded" sufficiently to encompass the form and content of Mark's Gospel.

the Graeco-Roman as to the Jewish literary world for a comparable literary analogy to the Gospels.

2.1.3. Bridging between what might be called the classical literary world and the world of contemporary literary criticism, D. Via's assigning Mark to the genre of tragicomedy reflects the approach of *structuralism* to Gospel criticism⁷⁵ and a shift from a "contextual"—the historical, sociological, and literary context—to a structuralist-literary orientation. Via eschews all attempts at delineating the Gospels' genre from a socio-historical reconstruction of the Gospels' setting,⁷⁶ since texts are not generated by history.⁷⁷ Via takes issue with the approach that seeks the genre from the analysis of a text's form and content.

Genre, according to Via, has to do with "the (unconscious) structure that controlled the material in the first place,"⁷⁸ a "hidden logical structure."⁷⁹ In other words, genre takes on a different meaning. It is the "structure or grid of syntagms⁸⁰ and paradigms"⁸¹ gained by "abstracting from several works a number of traits which they have in common . . . and are deemed to be more important than other traits which they do not have in common."⁸² Thus genre is that "hidden" or "unconscious" structure of the whole that is "beyond the text from which the latter draws its meaning."⁸³

After examining the variety of formulations of the kerygma in Paul's writings in terms of the comic genre,⁸⁴ Via turns to Mark's Gospel. He concludes that Mark was written because ". . . the/a kerygma proclaiming, and faith in, the death and resurrection of Jesus reverberated in the mind of Mark and activated the comic genre whose nucleus is also death and resurrection. . . . The story took the shape it did because the comic genre—deep generative structure of the human mind—generated the Gospel of Mark. . . ."⁸⁵ Thus, not unlike the kerygmatic theologians, Via starts with the early Christian kerygma as the catalyst for Mark's Gospel. But his explanation of how the kerygma served as this catalyst differs greatly from the evolutionary and constructive models often

75. *Kerygma and Comedy in the New Testament: A Structuralist Approach to Hermeneutic*, 1975.

76. *Ibid.*, 2-7, 78-90.

77. *Ibid.*, 28-31, 94-95.

78. *Ibid.*, 29, cf. 31, ". . . the logical structure of a narrative is more determinative than its literary form."

79. *Ibid.*, 31.

80. "The syntagm is a linear and irreversible succession or chain of words . . . spoken or written," *ibid.*, 11. In other words, the text or the narrative.

81. The paradigm is a system ". . . composed of operations or elements from the different texts (narratives) which have something in common, some kind of correlation," *ibid.*, 11.

82. *Ibid.*, 15.

83. *Ibid.*

84. "Death/resurrection is the image which stands at the heart of the comic form," *ibid.*, 49.

85. *Ibid.*, 93.

posited by form criticism. For him, the comic genre underlying the kerygma generated Mark's Gospel, which Via then designates generically to be a tragicomedy.⁸⁶ He supports his choice by referring to K. Guthke's work,⁸⁷ which argues that all tragicomedy has at least two of seven "structural patterns." Mark has four of the seven.⁸⁸

Many fundamental issues of literary criticism are involved here, not the least being the very nature and function of texts. In several ways, one has the distinct sense of *déjà vu* when following Via's quest for genre. The quest for a genre behind the text looks very much like the quest for the kerygma behind the myth. Demythologization becomes "decomposing and recomposing (a text) on 'a different plane.'" ⁸⁹ Instead of a history-transcending existentialist grid drawn from the history of religions school by the new hermeneutic, Via has placed on the text a structuralist-existentialist grid drawn by the structuralist from literary criticism. To this extent he may be the next logical, consistent twist or "generic transformation" of the genre "kerygmatic theology." What better alternative can one offer the text shaken free from its authorial intent and historical context?

Recognizing the impasse at the starting point of the question of genre, one can only say that any genre that can include the literary "forms of dramatic history, a biography or autobiography, the history of a given epoch—a Gospel . . ."⁹⁰ still has not answered why Mark wrote in the literary "form" he used.⁹¹ In what sense, one must ask, did the "story take the shape it did because (of) the comic genre?"⁹² Apparently, the genre could have generated numerous shapes, so one is still left without an explanation for Mark's literary form or shape, what has generally been called the "genre."

2.2. *Derivational*: Having reviewed some of the analogical explanations and noted their inadequacy either to provide comparable literary parallels sufficient to offer an appropriate genre (e.g. biography, apocalypse, aretalogy) or to offer an aetiological basis for explaining the particular form and materials of the Gospels (e.g. narrative history, tragicomedy), one comes again to the

86. Why the tragicomic genre rather than simply comic genre, the latter being the "generative structure in the kerygma which lies behind Mark," goes unexplained, except by reference to Beach's work on the tragic character of Mark's Gospel. Can one genre (comic) generate a work of another genre (tragicomedy)?

87. *Modern Tragicomedy*, 1966.

88. 1) It contrasts a tragic character with a comic world; 2) it contrasts the illusory world of the protagonist and the real world known to the audience or other characters (in Mark this is reversed, so that the protagonist knows the real world); 3) the course of events victimizes the protagonist who ironically becomes the tragic hero; 4) there is internal conflict within the protagonist of appearance and reality, promise and fulfillment or self-image and reality. *Kerygma*, 100-101.

89. *Ibid.*, 15.

90. *Ibid.*, 97.

91. Via's own question in ch. 3: "Why was Mark written in the form in which it was written?" *ibid.*, 71.

92. *Ibid.*, 93.

possibility that the Gospels stand apart, having no precise parallels within literary genres. This absence of suitable literary parallels raises at least the possibility that the Gospels represent a new literary genre. This conclusion has had its own advocates for much of this century.⁹³ But one still must account for this particular genre and give it some definition.

Three such explanations for the uniqueness of the gospel genre have emerged with slight variations from time to time. One attributes the Gospels to (1) an evolutionary process of early Christian tradition. Another and much later alternative disputes the first and assigns the gospel genre to (2) the creative genius of Mark who gave rise to a new literary product, the gospel, by combining traditional material into a framework. Finally, another alternative attributes the gospel genre to (3) the evangelist's writing down and explicating the traditional outline of the primitive Christian kerygma.

2.2.1. The *evolutionary* or "*constructive*" model has dominated much of German gospel studies for the past half century. Dibelius⁹⁴ offers one of the clearest statements of the developmental or "*constructive*" approach that persists to the present.⁹⁵ Accordingly, the Gospels represent simply the final phase in the evolution of the early Christian tradition⁹⁶ with the primitive Church's kerygma at its core. The final product, the Gospels, and the process itself were influenced especially for Dibelius by three factors: The primitive communities' eschatology, the Church's mission, and the kerygma of Jesus' death and resurrection.

Dibelius begins with the premise that the early Church lived with the expectation of the imminent parousia. This eschatological orientation qualified their literary intentions and qualified the content of the message. First, such a future anticipation left little "inclination for the production of books," especially among an "unlettered people" whose capacity for literary productivity was questionable.⁹⁷ Yet the Gospels did emerge in barely a generation as "literary" products of an author with literary analogies, but nonetheless as the end-product of a nonliterary, organic development of the tradition within the sociological matrix of the believing community.⁹⁸ Second, the futuristic eschatology led the Church to focus early on the cross and the development of the passion narrative,

93. Although the roots extend to the influential work done by two nineteenth-century scholars, F. Overbeck (e.g. "Über die Anfänge der patristischen Literatur," *HZ* 48, 1882, 417-72) and E. Norden (e.g. *Die antike Kunstprosa* II, 1898). Both had major impact on M. Dibelius and K. L. Schmidt.

94. *From Tradition to Gospel*, 1935; so R. Bultmann, *History of the Synoptic Tradition*, 1963; K. L. Schmidt, *Der Rahmen der Geschichte Jesu: Literarkritische Untersuchungen zur ältesten Jesusüberlieferung*, 1919; idem, "Stellung."

95. *Tradition*, 1-36; so P. Vielhauer, *Geschichte der urchristlichen Literatur*, 1975, 348-55.

96. E.g. Dibelius, *Tradition*, 3-4; esp. Bultmann, *History*, 321.

97. *Tradition*, 9.

98. *Ibid.*, 10-11.

since the passion narrative dealt with the first act of the end of the world as then believed and hoped.⁹⁹ By contrast, the "deeds of Jesus" preserved in the community's memory had only "incidental and not essential significance." These events in Jesus' ministry did not constitute the "introduction of the approaching world changes,"¹⁰⁰ and thus were not at the core of the primitive kerygma.

Dibelius developed his "constructive" approach by which he sought to reconstruct the process from tradition to Gospel by following Gunkel's lead and tracing the various *Sitze im Leben* of the traditional components of the Gospels. The broader context was the Church's mission in the world,¹⁰¹ which offered multiple contexts necessitating the reshaping and formation of the traditional units from the Church's preaching. Thus the "sermon," broadly defined,¹⁰² offered both the context and the parameters of the traditional material. Contextually, the various functions of the "sermon" in the mission shaped the traditions according to the sermon's requirements.¹⁰³ But, according to Dibelius, the sermon formally controlled what could have been used without "disturbing the sequence of the sermon."¹⁰⁴ This meant the absence of any disruptive features like a "detailed description of isolated matters" or anything the size of the passion narrative which was "too large for such a purpose."¹⁰⁵

The heart of the earliest mission kerygma and the heart of the Gospels was the cross and resurrection of Christ. Dibelius based this conclusion on an analysis of I Cor. 15:3-7 and the sermons in Acts.¹⁰⁶ Since this was the heart of the primitive kerygma and since this kerygma stems from "eyewitnesses and ministers of the word" (Luke 1:1-4), he concluded that the traditional materials concerning the passion were of primary significance for the Church. Here "salvation was visible. . . ."¹⁰⁷ Consequently the passion narrative takes on its fundamental character in the formation of the Gospels.

Since the other units of the Jesus-tradition serve as examples or illustrations in the sermon, in contrast to the passion narrative, "in itself a sermon by means of what the story contained. . . ,"¹⁰⁸ one can see why P. Vielhauer has concluded with

99. *Ibid.*, 22.

100. *Ibid.*, 24.

101. *Ibid.*, 11.

102. *Ibid.*, 15: ". . . all forms of Christian propaganda are included: mission preaching, preaching during worship, and catechumen instruction.

103. *Ibid.*, 26.

104. *Ibid.*, 24-25.

105. *Ibid.*, 27. To fit Dibelius's "sermon" context, the passion narrative served as the "text" for the sermon (23), or as an extended illustration following upon the message properly so-called (27).

106. *Ibid.*, 15-22.

107. *Ibid.*, 22.

108. *Ibid.*, 27.

others, first, that the Gospels bring nothing new,¹⁰⁹ and, second, that the Gospel is formally and materially a passion narrative with an extended introduction.¹¹⁰ In other words, the composition of the Gospels offers nothing new in principle. It merely completes what began with the earliest tradition. Mark, in short, is a "sermon" with the passion narrative as its core, and all that precedes serves as examples and illustrations that set the stage for the heart of the sermon. The Gospel brings together into one great "sermon" the various traditions arising from multiple contexts in the mission. These disparate traditions of Jesus' ministry are drawn together by the bond of Jesus' death and resurrection.

In this manner, one can account for the Gospel's formal distinctiveness and set its definition. The form evolved or "organically developed" from the traditional process, which always had the passion at its core. Since this traditional development had no "literary" concerns or inclinations from the outset—even disdained such intentions—and since the materials developed out of the requirements of the Church's mission, one should not be surprised that the end product, the Gospel, stands without literary parallel. Its "form" was endemic to its content. And since the content ultimately focused on the kerygma of the passion, a Gospel is essentially a "sermon" or the passion kerygma with an extended narrative.

2.2.2. This evolutionary accounting for the gospel "genre" has come under severe attack at several points, especially for the role or rather lack of any definitive role attributed to the evangelists in this process. Güttgemann's work represents one of the recent criticisms of this approach. He has faulted the "constructive" method at its starting points.¹¹¹

First, while form criticism has been exacting in its search for the Sitz im Leben of the Gospels' traditional components, it has failed to take into account the Sitz im Leben that gave rise to the written Gospels.¹¹² Furthermore, one cannot transfer directly the principles at work in isolated oral traditional units to that of a written document which has its given framework.¹¹³ Redaction criticism has shown the Gospels to be much more than the final stage in the development of anonymous tradition. Thus the familiar designation, "Kleinliteratur,"¹¹⁴ misleads when it results in classifying the Gospels as popular community "folklore" and propagandistic materials. Each Gospel reflects a careful, if not sophisticated, literary production by the respective writer.

109. *Geschichte*, 354, citing Bultmann, *History*, 321.

110. *Geschichte*, 354, echoing M. Kähler, *The So-Called Historical Jesus and the Historic, Biblical Christ*, ET 1964.

111. E. Güttgemann, *Offene Fragen zur Formgeschichte des Evangeliums*, 1970.

112. *Ibid.*, 82-86.

113. *Ibid.*, 86-92.

114. Cf. K. L. Schmidt, "Stellung," 50-134.

Second, the assumption that the primitive Church's "apocalyptic" eschatology precluded any literary interests has been convincingly countered by the presence of apocalyptic literature in general and the writings of Qumran in particular.¹¹⁵ One may even ask more fundamentally whether the early communities' futuristic orientation led them not only to disdain literary pursuits but to find the core of their gospel in the passion narrative rather than also in the words and deeds of Jesus.¹¹⁶

Third, Güttgemann appropriately questions the adequacy of Dibelius's "sermon" context and the generally accepted primitive kerygma of the cross to account for the Gospel's shape and content.¹¹⁷ Even should one be justified in positing a unified kerygma reflected in the development of the passion narrative, one still has not accounted for the shape of Mark's Gospel, not to mention Matthew, Luke, or John. Labeling everything prior to the passion narrative an "extended introduction" or arguing that the passion narrative had a determinative role in selecting and shaping the order of the tradition used in leading to the passion narrative begs the question of the shape and content of the Gospel.

Thus, Güttgemann has argued, in view of the inadequacies of the "form-critical" explanation of the gospel genre and in view of contemporary linguistic and literary scholarship, that the Gospel's (Mark's) uniqueness derives from its "origin" as a literary creation of Mark. To use Güttgemann's words, the Gospel form is an "autosemantic language form" that gains its meaning in and through itself.¹¹⁸ By combining the material (tradition) with a framework (the evangelist's own), the writer has created a Gestalt, a form that has its own theological significance that is greater than the sum of its parts.¹¹⁹ Therefore, Mark, for example, can no longer be explained and appropriately interpreted by an analysis of its parts removed from the whole.

Yet Güttgemann himself never defines this "Gestalt" created by Mark nor does he indicate what apart from random choice guided the first evangelist in writing his Gospel. After dismissing the kerygma as an hypothetical unity lost forever in the "darkness" of the past, he offers neither a structural analysis of Mark's "deep structure" (genre for the structuralists) nor any explanation of why Mark structured his Gospel the way he chose (genre as used in other literary contexts). Güttgemann leaves this assignment for a future task.¹²⁰ Whereas the evolutionary or constructive approach of form criticism assigned the literary uniqueness to the tradition and its history of development, Güttgemann is

115. Güttgemann, *Fragen*, 97-100.

116. *Ibid.*, 100-103, notes how little influence the imminent expectation had on Mark.

117. *Ibid.*, 190-222.

118. *Ibid.*, 197: "... Eine Sprachform, die in ihrem 'Sinn' nur durch und aus sich selbst erklärt werden kann...."

119. *Ibid.*, 184-88.

120. *Ibid.*, 251.

satisfied with attributing this uniqueness to the literary creativity of the evangelist.¹²¹ Neither approach, however, accounts for the formal and material characteristics of the Gospel, in short, its genre.

H.-T. Wrege concurs with Güttgemann's rejection of the form-critical solution to the question¹²² and his conviction that the Gospel is a Gestalt in which the whole is greater than the sum of the parts.¹²³ Furthermore, Wrege accepts the literary uniqueness of the gospel genre and traces it to the mutual interaction of the form and content, the evangelist's framework and the traditional units, the writing process.¹²⁴ But he offers a "structural" analysis and explanation of the Gospel by examining both the preliterary and literary stages, where he finds underlying structures (*Vorstrukturen*) such as "deed-consequence," "humiliation-exaltation," "Jew first-then Greek," "fathers-murders of the prophets," "master-student," etc., that led to the collecting of the disparate traditional units into larger units like the passion narrative.¹²⁵

These *Vorstrukturen* also influenced the evangelist's selection and arrangement of the tradition. For example, Mark parlayed the *Vorstruktur* of "unknowing-fulfillment" into the messianic secret motif. In doing so, he was able to combine the earthly Jesus ("not knowing"—before Easter) and the exalted Lord ("fulfillment"—after Easter) for the reader.¹²⁶ The evangelist used "fathers-prophet murderers" or "Jew first-then Greek" to set Jesus' way of the cross and the eventual message of the gospel for the Gentiles¹²⁷ and the "master-student" to indicate the way of discipleship.¹²⁸ Matthew and Luke-Acts modify Mark by adapting these *Vorstrukturen* to their own schemas.¹²⁹

Doubtless the preliterary as well as literary combination of disparate tradition followed an organizing thread, one of which certainly was thematic (cf. *Vorstrukturen*). But do the *Vorstrukturen* adequately explain the evangelists' selection and arrangement of the tradition from the perspective of the Gospel seen as a whole? Does the underlying structure(s) consciously or subconsciously give shape to the gospel genre? Or was the gospel genre itself

121. W. Schmithals, *Markus I*, 44-46, appears to take the "creativity" of the author quite seriously. Rather than assigning the gospel genre to the writer of Mark's Gospel as we know it (a redactional combination of a *Grundschrift* and Q), he assigns the basic narrative, beginning with the Baptist and ending with the passion narrative, including the miracle stories, apothegms, and some sayings material, to the author of the *Grundschrift*. He denies any historical evidence for the existence of this material as oral tradition (44-45).

122. *Die Gestalt des Evangeliums: Aufbau und Struktur der Synoptiker sowie die Apostelgeschichte*, BEvTh 11, 1978, 11-48.

123. *Ibid.*, 173-75.

124. *Ibid.*, 169-72.

125. *Ibid.*, 58-89.

126. *Ibid.*, 111-22, 171.

127. *Ibid.*, 58-95.

128. *Ibid.*, 91-110.

129. *Ibid.*, 124-58, 171.

a given that existed in its traditional framework that guided the evangelist's selection and ordering of the materials?

2.2.3. C. H. Dodd, whose work has been highly influential on the Anglo-American scene, offered an explanation that accounted for the "scheme of Gospel-writing by Mark" which served as the model for the other canonical Gospels.¹³⁰ On the surface, Dodd's stress on the kerygma and on the early Church's eschatology as formative influences on the Gospels appears closely related to Dibelius and the evolutionary approach to the Gospels. But Dodd differs at significant points to the extent that one must justifiably refer to his explanation of the gospel as the *explication* rather than the evolution of the kerygma.¹³¹

After carefully distinguishing between kerygma, the "public proclamation of Christianity to the non-Christian world," and didache as parenetic, apologetic, and expository instruction,¹³² Dodd sought first to delineate the basic outline of the Christian kerygma.¹³³ He distilled this outline from allusions in Paul to his own preaching (e.g. I Cor. 1:23; 2:2-6; 3:10; 15:1-17; II Cor. 4:4; Gal. 3:1; 1:14; Rom. 10:8-9; 14:9-10), from traditional formulations in his letters (e.g. I Cor. 15:3-7; Rom. 10:9; 8:31-34; 1:3-4, etc.), and from an analysis of the sermons in Acts.¹³⁴ Dodd's results correspond roughly to the outline found in Mark 1:14-15 and Acts 10:34-43.¹³⁵

Though Dibelius read the primitive kerygma in terms of the death and resurrection, Dodd found a more extended base by including above all the emphasis of fulfilled Scripture and the return of Christ. The latter element becomes significant because he combines the death, resurrection, and return of Christ as one "eschatological process," "inseparable parts of a single divine event."¹³⁶ In particular, the expectation of Christ's return was for Dodd the "impending verification of the Church's faith that the finished work of Christ has in itself eschatological value."¹³⁷ Consequently, whereas Dibelius and

130. *The Apostolic Preaching and its Developments*, 1936; idem, "The Framework of the Gospel Narrative," *ExpT* 43, 1931-32, 396-400.

131. Similar approaches could be ascribed to J. Schreiber, *Theologie des Vertrauens: Eine redaktionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung des Markusevangeliums*, 1967, who, like G. Schille, *Ärztliche der Kirche: Erwägungen zur apostolischen Frühgeschichte*, 1966, finds the outline of Phil. 2:6-11 behind Mark. P. Vielhauer, "Erwägungen zur Christologie des Markusevangeliums," in *Aufsätze zum Neuen Testament*, ThB 31, 1965, 199-214, finds a comparative religion parallel in the coronation scheme behind I Tim. 3:16; Heb. 1:5-13; cf. Rev. 5.

132. *Preaching*, 7.

133. Dodd uses "kerygma" as a technical but general term to refer to the "message" rather than to any specific formulation of the message.

134. *Preaching*, 9-24.

135. This comes close to Dibelius's allusion to the "skeleton" character of Acts' sermons; cf. *Tradition*, 25.

136. *Preaching*, 42, 33.

137. *Ibid.*, 42.

followers focused on a "futuristic eschatology," Dodd read the kerygma in terms of a "realized eschatology." This reading enabled him to combine the preaching of "Christ crucified" and the "gospel of the Kingdom," since both were ultimately eschatological statements of God's promised redemptive activity.

The extended delay in Christ's return led to two adaptations, according to Dodd, in the Church's thought.¹³⁸ The "authentic line of development . . . led to a concentration of attention upon the historical accounts of the ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus, exhibited in an eschatological setting which made clear their absolute and final quality as saving fact."¹³⁹ This development can be traced through Paul's writings and other epistles (cf. I Peter and Hebrews) and emerges most clearly in Mark.

Mark confronts the dilemma of the delay by focusing on the "deeds and words of Jesus" as a "valuation of the life of Jesus in eschatological terms."¹⁴⁰ Mark 1-8 does not offer simply the "introduction" for the passion narrative but the theme of the "kerygma as a whole,"¹⁴¹ which finds its explicit statement at Caesarea Philippi. Jesus has come as the promised Messiah. The theme of the passion begins in 8:31 so that Mark's proportionate emphasis on the passion corresponds with the emphasis of the primitive Christian preaching as reported in Acts, Paul, and Hebrews.¹⁴² But even this tragic narrative of suffering eventuates in glory, a motif that occurs repeatedly in Mark 8:31-16:8 (cf. the Transfiguration; Mark 13; rending of the veil; centurion's confession). Only a glorious account of the resurrection is missing, having been lost as the ending of Mark.¹⁴³ Therefore, Mark "conceived himself as writing a form of the kerygma," a "rendering of the apostolic Preaching."¹⁴⁴

Dodd supports this conclusion by showing how Mark actually follows and fills out the content of the outline of the apostolic preaching, especially as seen in Acts 10:34-43. First, Mark opens with the fulfillment of the Old Testament promise (1:1-15) by interpreting John's and Jesus' coming in view of Isaiah (cf. Acts 10:37, 43). Second, he expands the section (1:16-8:30) dealing with Jesus' ministry in Galilee "doing good and healing all that were oppressed by the devil" (cf. Acts 10:39-40). Therefore, Mark represents a "commentary on the kerygma."¹⁴⁵ Rather than being the final phase of the evolution of the early

138. Dodd concedes that a futuristic element developed in the early Church in view of the delayed return of Christ. He traces this departure from the kerygma and a return to Jewish apocalyptic through II Thessalonians, Mark 13, and Matthew's Gospel to the dead end street of second-century millennialism.

139. *Preaching*, 42.

140. *Ibid.*, 46.

141. *Ibid.*, 47.

142. *Ibid.*, 49.

143. *Ibid.*, 51.

144. *Ibid.*, 47.

145. *Ibid.*, 48-49.

Christian preaching (Dibelius), Mark is the "literaturization"¹⁴⁶ of the kerygma as the message of the Church. This explains what Mark is, its literary distinctiveness, the primitive Christian kerygma, and its basic shape.

Furthermore, by accepting the passion narrative (Mark 14-16) as a given in the tradition and by recognizing the arrangement of 8:31-12:44 around the passion sayings and Mark 13 as an assuring prelude for the passion narrative, Dodd needed only to find an organizing principle for the materials in 1:1-8:30. This "outline" he found in the summaries scattered throughout Mark. When taken together these summaries give a "perspicuous outline of the Galilean Ministry, forming a frame into which the separate pictures are set."¹⁴⁷

In this manner, Mark's Gospel emerges as a written expression of the Christian message about what God was doing in history through Jesus Christ—the kerygma, which Mark calls the "gospel" in 1:1. Strictly speaking the shape and content do not reflect the literary creativity of Mark, since these were basically given by the traditional "outline" of the kerygma and the traditional materials of the Church's preaching. But as the written kerygma the form and content have no comparable literary parallel. Mark's Gospel is unique. Yet it becomes a model for three other "Gospels," with only John a close follower of the model. Matthew and Luke make their own adaptation and modification of the models and thus alter the direction of the kerygma.¹⁴⁸

The weakness of Dodd's explanation has been scored on several accounts. Whereas Dibelius's category of the sermon was too broad, Dodd's distinction between kerygma and *didache* is too discreet. Much hinges on the disputed unity of the primitive Christian kerygma, particularly since Dodd has expanded the content from essentially the passion to include the Old Testament promise-fulfillment, Jesus' ministry, and his return in glory to judge. This "message" is supposedly common to Paul, Acts, and the Gospels. Further, Dodd's reading of the kerygma in terms of a "realized eschatology" stands in stark contrast to those who read it as a "futuristic eschatology." And especially questionable is whether the deeds and words of Jesus ever took the place of the second advent as the vindication of the validity of Jesus' ministry and thus led to the writing of Mark's Gospel and John.

Despite the serious questions to these integral elements in Dodd's explanation, his greatest vulnerability lies in the existence of a basic outline of the

146. D. Aune coins this expression in "The Problem of the Genre of the Gospels," in *Gospel Perspectives II*, 45.

147. "Framework," 399.

148. *Preaching*, 52-54; Matthew combines *didache* and kerygma and accents a "new, higher code of ethics" and a sharpened emphasis on futuristic eschatology. Luke gives a more "rationalized and humanitarian rendering of the Gospel. . . ." Naturally, for Dodd, John's realized eschatology comes closest to preserving the trend in Mark of accenting Jesus' earthly ministry as a vindication of the validity of that ministry.

kerygma that helped structure Mark's Gospel. The evidence is drawn from a supposedly common historical context and tradition underlying Acts, Paul, and the Gospels. Many have questioned this history of the tradition. Furthermore, Dodd's theory that the Marcan summaries provided the structure for the episodic narratives of 1:1-8:30 has gained few followers because of the dubious traditional character of these summaries, which he grouped together as an "outline of the whole ministry."¹⁴⁹

3. Mark 1:1 and the Gospel Genre

The survey has indicated the inadequacy of the analogical approach to the genre question, and the derivational approach leaves unanswered, for the most part, the ultimate questions of the Gospel's form and content as well. Only Dodd seems to have accounted for the structure and material of the gospel genre while giving due recognition to the role of the tradition and the evangelist. Yet Dodd's fatal flaw lay in his shaky foundation. Can one find a more adequate basis in the tradition for answering the genre question?

3.1. Mark's Gospel itself provides the major clue to the search for a genre. The Gospel opens with the familiar "heading" — "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Messiah, Son of God" — that has spawned endless debates over the meaning of each word. Yet an equally critical factor in understanding 1:1 has often been overlooked in the recent debates, namely, the relationship of 1:1 to 1:2-3. Many texts and commentators read 1:1 as though a unit in itself with 1:2 beginning a new section. This reading frees 1:1 to function independently of 1:2-3 and provides a greater range of possible interpretations otherwise excluded by a combination of 1:1 with 1:2-3. But the use of *καθὸς γέγραπται* and the comparable function of *ἀρχὴ* in other "headings" make the reading of 1:1 with 1:2-3 imperative.¹⁵⁰

3.1.1. Despite the observation that *καθὸς* may at times begin a sentence,¹⁵¹ the phrase *καθὸς γέγραπται* simply does not begin a new thought in New Testament Greek. First, the phrase *καθὸς γέγραπται* serves as one of several semi-technical introductory formulas for citing Scripture with numerous parallels in Jewish literature.¹⁵² Then as an introductory citation formula, *καθὸς*

149. "Framework," 399-400; cf. W. Egger, *Frohbotschaft und Lehre: Die Sammelberichte des Wirkens Jesu im Markusevangelium*, 1976.

150. See the work by G. Arnold, "Mk 1,1 und Eröffnungswendungen in griechischen und lateinischen Schriften," *ZNW* 68, 1977, 121-27.

151. Contra V. Taylor, *The Gospel According to St. Mark*, 21966, whose examples are inapplicable, since they do not include *καθὸς γέγραπται*.

152. See J. Fitzmyer, "The Use of Explicit Old Testament Quotations in Qumran Literature

γέγραπται invariably links what follows with what has immediately preceded in the context.¹⁵³ Consequently, the "Isaiah" citation in 1:2b-3 is linked directly to the opening statement in 1:1 by the *καθὸς γέγραπται* (1:2a). In other words, one has no grounds for separating 1:1 as a general heading for the Gospel and starting a new section with 1:2a by taking the formula syntactically with what follows in 1:4-8 (e.g. RSV, "As it was written . . . John the baptizer appeared . . .").

3.1.2. What then is the function of the rather clumsy statement in 1:1-3? A study of comparable uses of *ἀρχὴ* in extrabiblical literature¹⁵⁴ has shown that it pertains either to the immediate context¹⁵⁵ at the opening of a work or to the actual beginning of a work's main section that is set off from preliminary comments.¹⁵⁶ In no instance, however, does *ἀρχὴ* introduce an entire work as a whole.¹⁵⁷ Therefore, since 1:1 has no preliminary comments preceding it *ἀρχὴ* must refer to the immediate context or opening section of the work. Mark 1:1-3 serves then as the heading for the "beginning" section of the Gospel rather than for the work as a whole. The contents of this heading set the limits of the "beginning."

3.1.3. If *ἀρχὴ* refers to the "beginning" section of Mark's Gospel, then "gospel" in 1:1 cannot refer more generally to the "Christian message" whose "beginning" consists of Jesus' ministry as depicted by Mark in his Gospel (1:4-16:8).¹⁵⁸ And since "beginning" is not synonymous with the content of 1:4-16:8, the "gospel of Jesus Messiah" in 1:1 must include at least what follows in 1:4-16:8, the opening part of which the evangelist designates the "beginning of the gospel." In other words, the evangelist applies *ἐπαγγελίαν* in 1:1 to his literary work portraying Jesus' ministry in Galilee that eventuates in his death and resurrection in Jerusalem.¹⁵⁹ The evangelist calls his literary work "the gospel," because it represents the gospel concerning Jesus Messiah.

3.1.4. What precisely is the "beginning" of this "gospel"? The heading (1:1-3) indicates that the "beginning" corresponds to Isaiah's promise of a "messenger," a "voice in the wilderness," who prepares "the way of the Lord"

and in the New Testament," in *Essays on the Semitic Background of the New Testament*, 1971, 3-58, esp. 7-10.

153. E.g. II Kgs. 14:6 (LXX); Luke 2:23; Acts 7:42; cf. 13:33; 15:15; Rom. 1:17; 2:24; 3:4; 10: 4:17; 8:36; 9:13, 33; 10:15; 11:8, 26; 15:3, 9, 21; I Cor. 1:31; 2:9; II Cor. 8:15; 9:9.

154. See Arnold, "Eröffnungswendungen," 121-27.

155. E.g. Polybius 1.5.1; Dionysius of Halicarnassus 1.8.4; Josephus, *BJ* 1.30.

156. E.g. Isocrates, *Phil.* 1; Philo, *De Sob.* 1; *De Spec. Leg.* 1; Tacitus, *Hist.* 1.1.

157. The commonly cited parallel in Hos. 1:2 (LXX) does not hold up, since 1:2 does not serve as the heading for the book.

158. So Taylor, *Mark*, 152; R. Pesch, *Das Markusevangelium*, HTKNT III/1, 1977, 74-76; J. Gnulka, *Das Evangelium nach Markus*, EKK II/1, 1978, 42-43.

159. Cf., as representative of the opposing viewpoint, G. Strecker, "Das Evangelium Jesu Christi," in *Jesus Christus in Historie und Geschichte*, Festschrift H. Conzelmann, ed. G. Strecker, 1975, 536, n. 134.

(1:2b-3). Thus, Isaiah's promise sets the parameters of the "beginning." The Baptist's appearance and ministry in 1:4-8 corresponds without doubt to this promise. But Isaiah's promise and consequently the "beginning" do not conclude simply with the Baptist's appearance. The "Coming One" also appears in light of Isaiah.¹⁶⁰ John's role as preparer of the way includes Jesus' baptism (1:9-11) where Jesus is recognized as the heralded Coming One (cf. 1:7-8) whose way the "voice in the wilderness" had proclaimed (cf. Isa. 40:3).

Furthermore, the coming of the Spirit and the voice from heaven identify Jesus as the Spirit-equipped servant of Isa. 42:1 (1:11)¹⁶¹ and the Spirit-anointed messenger of the gospel of Isa. 61:1 (cf. 52:7; Mark 1:14-15).¹⁶² One might even argue that Mark's temptation account contains Isaianic motifs of the Edenic age of salvation.¹⁶³ Certainly, the emergence of Jesus, after the Baptist had been "delivered up,"¹⁶⁴ to preach the "gospel of God" (1:4) echoes Isa. 61:1 and 52:7, as seen in the eschatological explication concerning God's rule in 1:15 and the fulfillment of time. Thus "the beginning" of the gospel includes the appearance of the Baptist as the voice preparing the way (1:4-9; cf. 14a) and the appearance of the Coming One who is announced and equipped for his task of proclaiming God's eschatological rule (1:9-15) in keeping with Isaiah's promise. This for the evangelist is the "beginning of the gospel of Jesus Messiah" which he proceeds to narrate.¹⁶⁵

By explicitly identifying the "beginning of the gospel" with Isaiah, Mark connects the gospel to its Old Testament Jewish roots. The evangelist shows how the beginning events correspond to the Old Testament promise. At the same time, he depicts what follows as the "gospel of Jesus Messiah," the meaning of which has now been shaped by the Scriptural context in which it has been placed.¹⁶⁶ This is seen further by his introduction of Jesus as the one preaching the "gospel of God" (1:14-15), a correspondence to Isaiah's promise of the one who would herald the "gospel" (cf. Isa. 61:1; 52:7) that hardly appears to be coincidental. But how do the "gospel of Jesus Messiah" and the "gospel of God" relate to Isaiah's promise of the "bearer of the gospel"?

160. R. Guelich, "The Beginning of the Gospel" — Mark 1:1-15," *BR* 27, 1982, 8-10; Lührmann, "Biographie," 27-30.

161. Lührmann, "Biographie," 27-30. See I. H. Marshall, "Son of God or Servant of Yahweh? — A Reconsideration of Mark 1:11," *NTS* 15, 1968-69, 326-36.

162. Lührmann, "Biographie," 27-30.

163. Note Mark's emphasis on the "wilderness," Jesus' presence "with the wild animals," and the "angels ministering to him." All support a paradise motif commensurate with Isaiah's depiction of the age of salvation (e.g. 11:6-8; 65:25; cf. *Test. Naph.* 8:4-6; *Vita Adae et Evae* 32-38; *Apoc. Moses* 10-11).

164. See W. Popkes, *Christus Traditus. Eine Untersuchung zum Begriff der Dakingabe im Neuen Testament*, *ATHANT* 49, 1967, 143-45, for discussion of this verb as an indicator of Jesus' way.

165. E.g. L. Keck, "The Introduction to Mark's Gospel," *NTS* 12, 1965-66, 352-70.

166. Cf. similar usage in 13:10; 14:9; quite possibly the same usage lies behind 8:35; 10:29, where "the gospel" refers to the message about Jesus, the message that Mark has put into writing.

3.2. The phrases "the gospel of Jesus Messiah" and the "gospel of God" have their setting in the early Church's "Hellenistic" mission.¹⁶⁷ Yet Mark uses these phrases in a way novel to the rest of the New Testament.¹⁶⁸ First, he employs "the gospel of Jesus Messiah" to designate the narrative of Jesus' earthly ministry, which begins with the Baptist's appearance and eventuates in Jesus' death and resurrection in Jerusalem (1:4-16:8). Then the evangelist uses the "gospel of God" to refer to the message about the eschatological fulfillment of time and God's coming rule (1:15), rather than to speak about the one true God who acted and will act in his Son, as found, for example, in the "Hellenistic" mission (e.g. Rom. 1:1-4; I Thess. 2:8; cf. 1:9-10).¹⁶⁹ Yet since the "gospel of God" preached by Jesus (1:14-15) finds its expression for the evangelist not only in Jesus' preaching but above all in his ministry¹⁷⁰ of teaching, exorcisms, healings, and table fellowship with the sinners, which show him to be the "Messiah" (8:29) whose way must lead to the cross and resurrection (e.g. 8:31), the "gospel of God" is at the same time the "gospel concerning Jesus Messiah."¹⁷¹

3.2.1. This shift in gospel terminology by Mark represents no mean accomplishment. First, to identify the "gospel of Jesus Messiah" with the narrative of Jesus' ministry as well as to his death and resurrection breaks rather dramatically not only in form (narrative) but in content from the conceptual preaching and teaching of the "Hellenistic" mission, where "gospel of Christ" involved at times the hope of his return (e.g. I Thess. 1:10), his atoning death and resurrection (I Cor. 15:3-5), and his appointment as Son of God in power at the resurrection (Rom. 1:3-4).¹⁷² The mission focus appears to have been clearly on the death, resurrection, and return and not at all on Jesus' earthly ministry. Much the same has been said of Paul's use of the "gospel."

3.2.2. Second, to identify the "gospel of God" with the message of fulfillment of time and the coming of God's kingdom also breaks dramatically with the monotheistic overtones of the "Hellenistic" mission suggested by I Thess. 1:9, even assuming that a christological component was inherent in this "gospel of God," as implied by I Thess. 1:9-10 and Rom. 1:1-5. The fulfillment and kingdom language of Mark 1:15 has its roots deep in Jewish expectation, a

167. Strecker, "Evangelium," 523-24, who traces this to "Hellenistic" mission settings; P. Stuhlmacher, *Das paulinische Evangelium. I: Vorgeschichte*, *FRLANT* 95, 1968, 258-82, who traces these phrases to the "Hellenistic-Jewish" mission context.

168. The debate over whether 1:14-15 stems from pre-Marcian tradition or Mark's redaction is moot, since the evangelist has arranged the material in this context.

169. Stuhlmacher, *Evangelium*, 259-60.

170. E.g. K. G. Repploh, *Markus — Lehrer der Gemeinde*, *SBM* 9, 1969; A. M. Ambrozic, *The Hidden Kingdom: A Redaction-Critical Study of the References to the Kingdom of God in Mark's Gospel*, *CBQMS* 11, 1972; W. Kelber, *The Kingdom in Mark: A New Place and Time*, 1974.

171. This "gospel of God" expressed as the "gospel of Jesus Messiah" has its roots, according to Mark, in Isaiah's promise. Cf. Acts 10:36.

172. So Strecker, "Evangelium," 517-23.

context quite foreign, it would seem, to the "Hellenistic" mission. This message finds its most natural home in the earliest mission setting of the Church within Judaism. Finally, to identify the eschatological "gospel of God" with the narrative "gospel of Jesus Messiah" reflects an apparent break with all precedents. The assumption of this break by Mark with all precedents, especially his focus on Jesus' earthly ministry, has given rise to numerous explanations of Mark's Gospel.¹⁷³

3.2.3. Yet the explanation of Mark's use of "gospel" may lie in the tradition rather than in the evangelist's creative genius. By common consensus I Cor. 15:3-5 and Rom. 1:3-4 represent traditions stemming from the early Church, and Acts 10:34-43, though more debated, most likely also represents a traditional underlay. Each tradition explicitly or implicitly uses the *Scriptures* to identify God's redemptive purposes at work in Jesus; each identifies Jesus as the "Messiah," and each culminates in the *cross and resurrection* as the focal point of Jesus' ministry. In I Cor. 15:1 and Rom. 1:1 respectively, Paul calls the message he had received as tradition and for which he had been set apart "the gospel." Acts 10:36 refers to this event as the "preaching of the gospel of peace." Thus, one can correctly call this tradition the "gospel."

Furthermore, Mark's Gospel corresponds in broad outline with this tradition, especially christologically. Jesus is introduced in 1:1 as "Messiah, Son of God." This identity is then underscored by the voice from heaven at the baptism (1:11), at the Transfiguration (9:7), and ultimately by the centurion at the end (15:39), while Peter confesses Jesus to be the "Messiah" at the turning point, if not the climax, of the Gospel (8:29). The "Son" (Ps. 2:7), however, is qualified in 1:11 as the "servant" (Isa. 42:1), as the transfigured (exalted) one in 9:2-8, and as the crucified Son of God in 15:39. The "Messiah" is qualified as the suffering Son of Man in 8:31; 9:31; 10:33-34, whose true identity is recognized by the Roman centurion at the cross.

Therefore, Mark's Gospel corresponds with the christological anomaly found in the tradition noted above, namely, God's Son, the Messiah, accomplishes his work in the cross and resurrection. To this extent, Mark's Gospel, like the "gospel" in the tradition, is a passion narrative. But this correspondence fails to explain why Mark gives a narrative of Jesus' earthly ministry as the "gospel of Jesus Messiah" and how he can identify this with the "gospel of God" in its eschatological dimension. For the answer, one must look more closely at Acts 10:34-43.

3.3. There seems to be little doubt that Acts 10:34-43 shares the basic

173. Some eschatologically oriented: e.g. Marxsen, *Mark*, with a futuristic orientation, or Kelber, *Kingdom*, with a realized orientation; others christologically motivated: e.g. Weeden, *Traditions*, to correct a false θεϊός ἀνθρώπου christology, or Schreier, *Vertrauen*, to depict the redeemer myth behind Phil. 2:6-11.

framework of the "gospel," as we know it in Mark.¹⁷⁴ But the question remains whether the framework results from Luke's reflected structuring of the material in 10:34-43 into a "mini-gospel"¹⁷⁵ or whether a pre-Lucan tradition underlay Acts 10:36-43 containing the framework to which the Gospels correspond. Much, therefore, depends on the status of Acts 10:34-43 in critical studies.

The evaluation of this passage has just about come full circle. Whereas Dibelius considered the material indicative of a pre-Lucan sermon "skeleton"¹⁷⁶ and Dodd found in it the outline of the primitive kerygma,¹⁷⁷ later appraisals of this and the other speeches in Acts attributed the form and much of the content to Luke's redactional creativity rather than to the tradition.¹⁷⁸ U. Wilckens, for example, concluded that Luke shaped this "sermon" in the form of a "gospel" appropriate to its more catechetical (cf. Luke 1:1-4) than evangelistic function in Acts 10 (cf. οἰκονομία, 10:36). This setting accounts for Luke's addition of the rather extensive Jesus materials found at its core.¹⁷⁹ The trend now, however, appears to favor a broader pre-Lucan tradition adapted by Luke for his purposes in Acts 10.¹⁸⁰

P. Stuhlmacher, in particular, has argued strongly for a pre-Lucan tradition on the basis of language, correspondence to the tradition in I Cor. 15:3-5, and the incongruity between Luke's own Gospel outline and the outline of the summary in 10:33-43.¹⁸¹ More recently, G. Stanton has also argued for the pre-Lucan character of this material primarily on the basis of the unusual use of four Old Testament passages (Ps. 107:20; Isa. 52:7; 61:1; Deut. 21:22) to summarize Jesus' life and give it significance.¹⁸² Stanton then lists several

174. E.g. Dodd, *Preaching*; U. Wilckens, *Die Missionsreden der Apostelgeschichte*, WMANT, 2, 1963, 68-70; Stuhlmacher, *Evangelium*, 277, n. 2.

175. So Wilckens, *Missionsreden*, 68-70.

176. Dibelius, *Tradition*, 25. But see "Die Bekehrung des Cornelius," in *Aufsätze zur Apostelgeschichte*, FRLANT 42, 1961, 96-107, esp. 97-98, where he underscores Luke's redactional work in 10:34-43. Cf. K. Haacker, "Dibelius und Cornelius: Ein Beispiel formgeschichtlicher Überlieferungskritik," *BZ* 24, 1980, 234-51, esp. 244-46.

177. Dodd, *Preaching*, 46.

178. E.g. especially Wilckens, *Missionsreden*, 63-70; E. Haenchen, *The Acts of the Apostles*, ET 1971, 351-59.

179. Wilckens, *Missionsreden*, 68-70.

180. E.g. H. Conzelmann, *Acts of the Apostles*, Hermeneia, ET 1987, 80; O. Steck, *Israel und das gewaltsame Geschick der Propheten*, WMANT 23, 1967, 267-69; Stuhlmacher, *Evangelium*, 277, n. 2, 279, n. 1; E. Lohse, "Die Frage nach dem historischen Jesus in der gegenwärtigen Forschung," *ThLZ* 87, 1962, 161-64 = *Die Einheit des Neuen Testaments: Exegetische Studien des Neuen Testaments*, 1973, esp. 35-36; G. Stanton, *Jesus of Nazareth in New Testament Preaching*, SNTSMS 27, 1974, 70-81; J. Roloff, *Die Apostelgeschichte*, NTD V, 1981, 168.

181. *Evangelium*, 279, n. 1: a) The unusual use of ἐκπληροῦσθαι in 10:36; the catechetical use of οἰκονομία; cf. λόγος and Acts 13:26, 32. b) The titular use of Christ, 10:36; the resurrection on the "third day," 10:40; reference to Scriptural basis, 10:43, in place of the usual call to repentance in previous sermons in Acts, all correspond to I Cor. 15:3-5. c) Luke's Gospel begins with an infancy narrative (also Haenchen, *Acts*, 360f.; E. Lohse, *Einheit*, 35-36).

182. Stanton, *Jesus*, 70-78, suggests that Ps. 107:20 (and its context) provides the language that opens this material, τὸν λόγον ἀνθρώπου (10:36). The context of Ps. 107:20 identifies the subject as God, and "the word" delivers God's people and "heals" them. This motif, according to Stanton, is

distinctive themes in 10:36-43 that either contrast with Luke's usage elsewhere or do not appear in Luke's writings.¹⁸³

One might further support this argument for the traditional character of the material most in question, i.e. the "life of Jesus" summary in 10:37-38, by noting that it consists of expressions quite untypical of Luke's language,¹⁸⁴ such as: "Jesus, the one from Nazareth,"¹⁸⁵ "with the Holy Spirit and power,"¹⁸⁶ "doing good" (hapax legomenon), "healing those oppressed by the devil,"¹⁸⁷ and the observation, "God was with him."¹⁸⁸ When one adds the unusual references to "hang him on a tree," his being "raised on the third day," and ordained to judge "the living and the dead" at the end, and the unusual expression "preaching the gospel of peace through Jesus Christ" at the beginning, one must conclude that the evidence¹⁸⁹ strongly favors the existence of pre-Lucan material behind Luke's redaction in 10:34-43.¹⁹⁰

carried through the summary in 10:37 where it is picked up in the Isa. 61:1 context. The "word" is then identified as that "proclaiming the good news of peace through Jesus Christ," which is drawn from Isa. 52:7, to explicate the first Old Testament allusion. This "good news" is then picked up in 10:38 by the reference to Jesus' baptism where he is "anointed" with the "Spirit" to proclaim the good news to the poor and to "heal" the afflicted, a clear reference to Isa. 61:1. Finally, another Old Testament reference, Deut. 21:22, expresses Jesus' death as "hanging on the tree." Since this weaving together of verses was typical of early Church exegesis as found throughout the New Testament, but not particularly typical of Luke's style, Stanton finds this passage to contain traditional material.

183. For example, *Jesus*, 78-79: 1) Why give the Baptist such prominence in 10:37, if otherwise the great redemptive-historical break between the Baptist and Jesus is Luke's theme? 2) Jesus is depicted as a miracle worker and prophet rather than as teacher, cf. Acts 1:1-3) The devil in Luke is more "psychological" (so H. Conzelmann, *The Theology of Luke*, 1960, 157), whereas he is the oppressor in a Marcan sense in 10:38. 4) Acts 10:42 makes no reference to Gentile mission, a motif appropriate to the context and emphasized in Acts 1:8 and Luke 24:47.

184. Contra Conzelmann, *Apostelgeschichte*, 80. Stanton, *Jesus*, 78-79, notes that "peace through Jesus Christ" sounds more like Rom. 5:1 than Luke and "Judge of the living and the dead" has no parallel elsewhere in Luke.

185. Cf. Ἰησοῦς ὁ Ναζαρεθῶτης in 2:22; 3:6; 4:10; 6:14; 22:8; 26:9.

186. Cf. Acts 1:8, but also Rom. 1:4; I Cor. 2:4; I Thess. 1:5.

187. "Healing," a rather common concept in Luke but never combined with "oppressed by the devil" (note Stanton's observation about Luke's use of the "devil" in n. 171).

188. Cf. John 3:2; 8:29.

189. The evidence may not be beyond question in part. For example, Luke's use of λόγος in Acts, especially in combination with the "gospel" (cf. 8:4; 15:7, 35), may suggest a Lucan adaptation in 10:36 rather than Ps. 107:20. (Note H. Riesenfeld, "The Text of Acts x.36," in *Text and Interpretation*, Festschrift M. Black, ed. E. Best and R. McL. Wilson, 1979, 191-94, who argues for the longer reading that would change the focus of λόγος.) Yet that would not ameliorate the force of Isa. 52:7; 61:1 and Deut. 21:22 and its usage in this passage. Stuhlmacher and Lohse's argument (see n. 170) based on the incongruity of Luke's Gospel and the outline of 10:32-42 loses weight when one observes that Luke does not begin Jesus' ministry until after the baptism, when John was removed from the scene (Luke 3:18-22). Furthermore, the absence of a call to repentance may stem from the context rather than being in compliance with a tradition comparable to I Cor. 15:3-5 (Steck, *Geschick*, 207, n. 3, attributes the call to repentance found in the other sermons of Acts to their peculiar setting in a Jewish mission). The reference to the "prophets" as scriptural basis for the message has its parallel in Luke 24:27, 42-44.

190. Luke's redaction appears most evident in 1) his temporal distinction between John's preaching of baptism and Jesus' "beginning." This bifurcation between the Baptist's ministry and

3.3.1. If one takes genre to consist of a work's form and material viewed as a whole, this tradition underlying Acts 10:34-43 anticipates the literary genre of gospel, since Mark's Gospel directly corresponds formally and materially with this tradition. *Formally*, Mark clearly follows a similar outline, as Dodd argued a generation ago. First, the evangelist specifically refers to the Baptist's appearance, the baptism of Jesus and his emergence "after John had been delivered up" to preach the "gospel of God" (1:14-15) as the "beginning" of the "gospel of Jesus Messiah." Second, the narrative of Jesus' ministry from Galilee to Jerusalem certainly corresponds to his going about "doing good" and "healing the oppressed" as seen by his ministry to those with various needs.¹⁹¹ Finally, the passion narrative and the Easter appearances move the story to its concluding climax in Jesus' atoning death (10:45; 14:24) and the resurrection, motifs included and developed in the conclusion of Acts 10:39-43. Such an "outline" may seem most natural for a "gospel" until compared with the later writings bearing the designation "gospel" and even Q, which has at times been called a primitive gospel.

3.3.2. *Materially*, Acts 10:36 begins with a clear reference to the Old Testament context of Jesus' ministry by citing Isa. 52:7. Mark introduces his work as the "gospel of Jesus Messiah," which includes his preaching of the "gospel of God" (1:1, 14-15). Acts 10:36 refers to the events seen in Jesus' ministry, death, and resurrection as "God preaching the gospel of peace through Jesus Christ." In other words, both Mark 1:1 and Acts 10:36 characterize the message about Jesus Christ as the "gospel": Acts by using the verb form found in Isa. 52:7, Mark by using the noun form drawn from Christian preaching (1:1). The content of each is the same, namely, God's promised redemptive activity to bring salvation and wholeness, or, in other words, the establishment of God's sovereign rule, the "kingdom of God," in history (Isa. 52:7; 61:1) through Jesus' ministry, death, and resurrection. The "gospel of peace" in Acts 10:34-43 and the "gospel of Jesus Messiah" in Mark 1:4-16:8 are one and the same, and their roots lie in God's promise given by Isaiah, according to Mark 1:1-3 and the opening statement of Acts 10:36. Therefore, Mark's choice of terminology in 1:1, 14-15—"gospel of Jesus Messiah" and "gospel of God"—corresponds materially with the usage of Acts 10:36 and the content of Acts 10:36-43. This correspondence suggests a common "gospel" tradition in the Church.

If the basic *framework* of Mark's Gospel and the Scriptural context for Jesus', especially apparent in Luke 16:16 (cf. 3:19-22), makes the reference to the "anointing" at Jesus' baptism which "begins" his ministry in 10:37-38 a bit awkward, since "beginning" precedes the reference to the Baptist's preaching of baptism. 2) The reference to the "witnesses" in 10:39a and 3) the common eating and drinking with Jesus sound very similar to Luke 24:41-43. Finally, 4) the reference to the prophets as the basis for what has transpired appears similar to Luke 24:27, 42-44.

191. Doubtless coincidental, but Mark opens Jesus' public ministry with the awkwardly introduced exorcism of 1:21-28.

his calling it the "gospel of Jesus Messiah" corresponds to what one finds in the tradition behind Acts 10:34-43, the traditional character of Mark's *material* used in writing the Gospel is even more apparent. Certainly the preliterary existence of the Gospel's material in oral traditional units is one of the "assured results" of form criticism, W. Schmithals notwithstanding.¹⁹² Form criticism has also shown how much of this material has been shaped along familiar lines, so that the Gospels contain "forms" that correspond to those found in extrabiblical sources. But the very existence of these traditional units and even traditional blocks of units behind Mark's Gospel should make the existence of the "gospel" in narrative as well as conceptual or propositional form obvious.

While form critics have scrutinized each traditional unit for nearly two generations in search of its literary form and socio-religious Sitz im Leben, the research has too frequently forgotten that each traditional unit made its own "christological" as well as "ecclesiological" (and now "sociological") statement. To the extent that each unit bore witness in some manner to who Jesus was as the one in whom God was acting in keeping with his Word—a motif that formed all traditional levels of the Church's life from "Jerusalem" to "Rome," as the New Testament writings repeatedly indicate—to that extent each traditional unit functioned as an expression in part of the "gospel." Just as the "conceptual gospel" focused at times on the return of Christ (I Thess. 1:9-10), the atoning death and resurrection (I Cor. 15:3-5), or the exalted Son of God (Rom. 1:3-4), the "narrative gospel" found its expression at times in miracle stories, apothegms, sayings, parables, discourses, and even the passion narrative. These represent but various expressions of the gospel, the good news about what God was doing or had done in Jesus' ministry.

3.4. Mark's achievement, therefore, lies in selecting, arranging, and bringing together¹⁹³ the traditional narrative and saying units or blocks around the traditional framework of the gospel as seen behind Acts 10:36-43 and putting it in writing. To the extent that Mark first put the "gospel" in *written* form, he created a new *literary* genre, the gospel. But Mark did not create this genre *de novo*. The necessary formal and material components lay at hand in the tradition. In other words, the literary gospel ultimately represents the Church's gospel in narrative form.

192. Schmithals's assignment of the form and content to the creativity of the writer of the Grundschrift and his denial of any historical trace of underlying oral tradition (*Markus* I, 44-45) fly in the face of the results of form criticism and fail to account for the amazing stylistic similarity between the Grundschrift and similar narratives and sayings found in Matthew's and Luke's special traditions.

193. This is not to deny the special emphases or the redactional contribution made by the evangelist, such as his emphasis on discipleship and the "messianic secret." Yet the absence of any clear-cut "pattern," or for that matter any agreement among scholars even on an outline of Mark, suggests that his primary task was to write the "gospel of Jesus Messiah."

3.4.1. This *literary* gospel then became the model for at least Matthew and Luke and perhaps John. To be sure, none of the other Gospels followed Mark's lead in his use of εὐγγέλιον,¹⁹⁴ and both Matthew and Luke made their respective modifications of the genre by their adaptation of it and other traditional materials to shape their own Gospels according to the evangelist's and/or his community's situation.¹⁹⁵ But the emphasis on the differences between each Gospel has tended to blur the basic similarity of all three synoptic Gospels. Jesus is consistently portrayed as the "Messiah" promised in the Scriptures who carries out God's redemptive purposes. Matthew and Luke underscore this by "beginning" their Gospels with infancy narratives whose function above all accents who Jesus is in light of the Scriptures. Furthermore, all three Gospels open Jesus' ministry in Galilee against the backdrop of Isa. 61:1, though each does so differently (Mark 1:14-15; Luke 4:16-21; Matt. 5:3-6¹⁹⁶). This ministry consists of words and deeds that show him to be the one in whom God was redemptively at work inaugurating his *shalom*, his sovereign rule of justice.¹⁹⁷ Finally, Matthew and Luke conclude with a passion narrative that culminates in the Easter appearances to witnesses who are then commissioned to proclaim the message, an element much closer to Acts 10:36-43 than to Mark 16, as it now stands.

3.4.2. Even John's Gospel fits the same basic framework though differing greatly in the materials used. After a prologue that identifies Jesus in terms of God, creation, the Baptist, and Moses (N.B. the backdrop of Jewish Scriptures), the narrative moves from the Baptist, the "voice" of Isa. 40:3, through Jesus' signs and discourses to the cross and resurrection and concludes with the equipping and commissioning of the disciples by the resurrected Christ.

The relation of John, however, to the model, Mark, remains far from clear.¹⁹⁸ Whereas some trace John's outline back to Marcan influence and others to an independent tradition with common roots in the synoptic tradition, the issue is ultimately moot for this discussion. In either case, the fourth Gospel

194. Matthew focuses the term even more by defining it as the "gospel of the kingdom," a phrase certainly congruent with Mark's usage, if one takes kingdom of God in the sense used by Matthew as an expression of God's promised redemptive activity for his own. Luke may well follow Mark's lead by his redemptive-historical division of the "gospel" into Israel (Scripture), Jesus Christ (Gospel), and witnesses (Acts).

195. Yet to consider Matthew a "manual of discipline" fails to account for the significant differences between Matthew and such "manuals" as the Didache or the Qumran Manual of Discipline. To consider Luke a *bios* again fails to note the basic breakdown between Luke's Gospel and supposedly similar "lives."

196. R. Guelich, *The Sermon on the Mount: A Foundation for Understanding*, 1982, 112-18.

197. See P. Stuhlmacher, "The New Righteousness in the Proclamation of Jesus," in *Reconciliation, Law, and Righteousness*, ET 1986, 30-49.

198. For a thorough discussion of recent viewpoints, see R. Kysar, *The Fourth Evangelist and His Gospel: An Examination of Contemporary Scholarship*, 1975, 38-66 and his survey in *NovT* 15, 1973, 134-52.

attests the fundamental format of the Church's message about Jesus around which the literary Gospels were written. Should John indeed be independent from Mark,¹⁹⁹ then one has another basis for the traditional character of the gospel genre in the early Church's preaching and teaching. Acts 10:34-43, Mark, and then John would all share the same basic "genre" of the gospel.

3.4.3. But what about the so-called "gospels" emerging in the second century and later? How do they correspond to the genre of the four Gospels? The Church fathers do refer to a number of other works as "gospels," and several writings bearing the designation "gospel" have appeared in manuscript finds, most notably among the Nag Hammadi codices.²⁰⁰ Yet many of these "gospels" come to us in name only, since their content exists only in scattered citations, if at all. Consequently, the literary evidence remains so fragmentary that one can hardly make adequate comparisons.

Two developments, however, can be traced. On the one hand, sufficient evidence exists to suggest that some of the "gospels" referred to by the fathers represent variations of the canonical Gospels.²⁰¹ These would have followed the Gospels in structure and material. On the other hand, a distinctive type of "gospel" emerges that radically differs in structure and material from the Gospels. Since these "gospels" often consist of discourses or dialogues of Jesus, some have placed them on a trajectory with Q as another form of "gospel."²⁰² To the extent that Q and these "gospels" represent to the hearer/reader the "gospel" = "good news by Jesus of God's redemptive activity," they would indeed be "gospels." But to the degree that they differ formally and materially from the gospel genre noted in the Gospels and in the tradition behind Acts 10:36-43, they do not belong to the gospel genre. The same conclusion would obtain for a collection of miracle stories, apothegms, parables, and even the passion narrative itself. Whereas these are constituent parts of the gospel genre, they are not the whole and do not represent the gospel genre.

Furthermore, one cannot speak of these later "gospels" generically, since

199. The apparent tendency in contemporary Johannine scholarship, as seen in the works of R. Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St. John* I, 1968, 68-72; R. Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, AB, 1966, I, xli-xlvii; B. Lindars, *The Gospel of John*, NCBC, 1972, 25-28; O. Cullmann, *The Johannine Circle*, 1976; E. Haenchen, *John*, Hermeneia, ET 1984, I, 75; S. Smalley, *John: Evangelist and Interpreter*, 1978, 102-19. Two notable exceptions are C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to John*,² 1978, 15-22 and F. Neirynck, "John and the Synoptics," in *L'Évangile de Jean*, ed. M. de Jonge, 1977, 73-106.

200. For an extensive survey see R. Kraft and J. Timbie's review of *The Nag Hammadi Library in English*, 1977, in *RSR* 8, 1982, 32-52. For a collection of these and related materials, see R. Cameron, *The Other Gospels: Non-Canonical Gospel Texts*, 1982.

201. E.g. the Gospel of the Nazareans and the Gospel of the Ebionites both appear to be variants of Matthew's Gospel. The Secret Gospel of Mark clearly relates to Mark and the Gospel of the Hebrews may reflect influence from all four canonical Gospels.

202. So Robinson, *Trajectories*, 71-113, and Koester, *Trajectories*, 166-204.

they do not reflect any homogeneity in structure and/or content. For example, five of the works associated with Nag Hammadi bear the designation "gospel" either in the opening line or in an incipit.²⁰³ Yet one, the Gospel of the Egyptians, deals with the life and redemptive activity of Seth; another, the Gospel of Philip, is a collection of teaching on the sacraments and ethics; another, the Gospel of Thomas, is a collection of teachings by the "living Jesus"; and another, the Gospel of Mary, is a revelation discourse of the resurrected Lord with his disciples. If one discounts the use of "gospel" with three of these,²⁰⁴ two remain that consist of Jesus' secret teaching to one or more disciples (the Gospels of Thomas and Mary). This theme and content appears in six other works from Nag Hammadi and in the Epistle of the Apostles. But none of these carries the designation of "gospel."²⁰⁵ Three even exist in the genre of an epistle.²⁰⁶ Therefore, these later writings contribute little of significance for the discussion of the gospel genre. The most that one can say is that the term "gospel" continued to function in the Church as it always had, with the broader meaning of the message of "good news" about Jesus as the one who brings salvation, even though salvation in these writings has been radically redefined in contrast to its meaning in the canonical Scriptures.

4. Summary and Conclusions

In light of the review and discussion of the gospel genre, several observations can be made to draw this material together in summary with some obvious conclusions.

4.1. The Gospels do stand without adequate parallel in form and content in the literary world. By comparison they share formally and materially more in common with each other than either or all shares with any other literary genre. Therefore, the Gospels do constitute a literary genre.

4.2. The Gospels constitute a literary genre, but not a "unique literary genre." The Gospels' collective distinctiveness lies in their forming a genre. By definition, genre connotes a certain formal and material uniqueness about a work or group of works. Therefore, "unique literary genre" is redundant, since by definition a genre is unique. By referring to the Gospels as *sui generis* one simply affirms that they constitute their own literary genre.

203. The Gospel of Truth, Gospel of the Egyptians, Gospel of Thomas, Gospel of Philip, and Gospel of Mary.

204. The Gospel of Truth, Gospel of the Egyptians, and Gospel of Philip; so Robinson, *Trajectories*, 76-78.

205. The First Apocalypse of James, the Apocalypse of Peter, the Apocryphon of James, the Book of Thomas the Contender, the Sophia of Jesus Christ, the Letter of Peter to Philip, and the Dialogue of the Savior.

206. The Apocryphon of James, the Letter of Peter to Philip, and the Epistle of the Apostles.

4.3. The representatives of this genre are limited in number (four canonical Gospels and fewer lost apocryphal Gospels) and in time (to the period of the emerging Church, a generation or so before and after the turn of the first century AD). Furthermore, three of the four canonical Gospels are so closely related as to suggest that one influenced the other two, if not also the fourth. The evidence even suggests that some of the apocryphal Gospels were dependent on these earlier Gospels. Nevertheless, one can still without hesitation speak of a gospel genre, since genre neither requires a set number of representatives nor total literary independence.

4.4. What then is this literary genre called a "gospel"? *Formally*, a gospel is a narrative account concerning the public life and teaching of a significant person that is composed of discreet traditional units placed in the context of the Scriptures. Mark, Acts 10:34-42, and John each set the narrative against the backdrop of the Scripture and focus, beginning with the Baptist's appearance to "prepare the way," on Jesus' ministry as it ranged from Galilee to Jerusalem where the narrative concludes with the death, resurrection, and appearances to the disciples. The infancy narratives in Matthew and Luke do not formally change this pattern, since they serve to identify Jesus particularly in light of the Scriptures rather than to signal the beginning of Jesus' ministry. They, like Mark's "beginning" (1:1-15) and John's "prologue," highlight the Scriptural context of the ensuing narrative. Furthermore, Mark's ending, as it presently exists, anticipates Jesus' appearances to his own, a fact obviously known to the reader. Thus, Mark could have concluded with this assumption of his reader's knowledge, or one can also argue for a "lost ending." Ultimately the issue is moot, since the resurrection and appearances of Jesus are not in doubt.

Formally, the framework or structure of this narrative existed in the Church's preaching and teaching. The evidence for this lies in the common framework underlying Acts 10:36-43, Mark's Gospel, and possibly John's Gospel. Yet this framework set only the general parameters, allowing for considerable flexibility in the arrangement of the materials within the framework, as a comparison of all four Gospels indicates.

Materially, the genre consists of the message that God was at work in Jesus' life, death, and resurrection, effecting his promises found in the Scriptures. In other words, the gospel genre made a statement about God, Jesus Christ, and his/their ministry. Set in the context of the Scriptures, the message makes clear that God is God, Yahweh, the Lord, who had spoken about his actions in history on behalf of his people and the nations. Jesus is identified as the one whom God had ordained and in whose life and death God was at work to accomplish his purposes. These purposes were the establishment of *shalom*, wholeness, the reestablishment of broken relationships between himself and his own, the defeat of evil, the forgiveness of sins, and the vindication of the poor.

The heralding of this message was called "preaching the gospel." Therefore, the message was indeed the "gospel of God" and simultaneously the "gospel of Jesus Christ."

Materially, the tone, language, content, and style to a great extent were found in the discreet traditional units used by the evangelists. This material had been formed, used, and preserved as oral tradition in the Church. Each unit had served to indicate what God was doing in Christ and its implications for the hearer. Some of the units had been combined into collections of stories and/or sayings. Some remained as independent units. The evangelists exhibit great freedom to take over *en bloc* or to combine and rearrange the materials for their own needs and purposes. Yet each reflects a care of and faithfulness to the tradition—even when their reworking is traceable. The message of each Gospel remains amazingly similar.

4.5. In view of the traditional character of the framework and the material, indicating that the contents were the common possession of the community, the evangelists had no cause for claiming their work to be "original" or "their" gospel. The Church's gospel was the message of "good news" to the hearer and so was the literary gospel for the reader. This message did not come from the evangelist but from Jesus Christ, and ultimately from God. Thus, the very nature of the message and its traditional roots necessitated that the Gospels be anonymous. It was the "gospel concerning Jesus Messiah" preached by Jesus and by his commissioned witnesses that the evangelists sought to capture in writing.

4.6. The evangelists' use of tradition, shaped at times in familiar forms analogous to other familiar forms such as miracle stories, apothegms, discourses, etc., means that the components of the gospel genre do at times have "literary" parallels. Yet the evangelists' use of the traditional framework and material inherent in the distinctive Christian gospel meant that the actual literary product, their Gospels, stood without parallel. The Gospels form a literary genre by virtue of the form and content of the tradition with which the evangelists were working. Therefore, while creating the "literary genre" of the gospel by placing the traditional message in writing, the evangelists did not create the form and content of this gospel. That was the "whole" from which the parts were understood in the Church's preaching and teaching.

4.7. Because the gospel was familiar to the Church, the written genre had its setting in a familiar context, a context from which to interpret the Gospels. This also means that the historical context within the early Church that made the gospel genre intelligible must be taken into consideration when interpreting the Gospels as literary works. Removed from the historical context of the Church's gospel, which gave rise to the literary gospel genre, the Gospels become like J. Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* set free from its sociopolitical context. Such works take on meaning from another genre (e.g. children's literature or

any tale on the one hand; historical narrative, biography, comedy, or even apocalyptic, on the other). Consequently, one misses or distorts the "authorial intent," an issue that is irrelevant for some literary critics, but quite germane if one takes seriously the gospel genre as delineated above.

4.8. Since the Gospels constitute a literary genre and since a genre gives the sense of the whole, the "context of expectation," for the parts, one must read and interpret each Gospel as a whole. The exegetical atomization of the Gospels leads to the distortion of the literary products just as the atomization of the tradition has led to the distortion of the Church's gospel.

4.9. What then are the Gospels? The Gospels are a literary genre whose form and content consist of, to use Mark's words, the "gospel of Jesus Messiah, Son of God."

Literary, Theological, and Historical Problems in the Gospel of Mark

Martin Hengel

1. A Disputed Gospel

No Gospel has occupied scholars so intensively over the last decade as that of Mark, and nowhere has the discussion been more heated than in connection with it. In Germany, four extensive commentaries have appeared one after the other in rapid succession, and the irreconcilable differences between them show up the dilemmas of research into Mark. The monumental two-volume commentary by Rudolf Pesch¹ regards Mark as the "conservative redactor"² who for the most part uses written sources—here Pesch parts company with the early form-critical approach—and works on his traditions sparingly and with restraint, refraining from ambitious literary and theological elaboration. Therefore for Pesch the Gospel of Mark is the main source for a reconstruction of the activity and passion of Jesus.

At the opposite extreme to this stands the radical "redaction-critical" commentary by Walter Schmithals.³ He throws overboard the results of the form criticism of his own teacher R. Bultmann, which for long had hypnotized

1. R. Pesch, *Das Marcusevangelium*, HTK IV/1, ³1980; II/2, ²1980. See the extended critical reviews by F. Neirynck, *Evangelica, Gospel Studies—Études d'Évangeli*, BETL 60, 1982, 491-564.

2. Op. cit., 1, 2: "Because Mark is guided by catechetical and missionary interests, because the conservative redactor is compiling traditional material and is hardly producing literature. . . ."

3. W. Schmithals, *Das Evangelium nach Markus*, two vols., ÖTK II/1, 2, 1979, and here above all the Introduction, 1, 21-70. See the review by Neirynck (above n. 1, 613-17): "Malgré le caractère fanatisé de certaines positions de S., son commentaire rendra certainement service à l'exégèse marcienne" (617). Quite certainly, the author shows all that can be done with Mark today. He has now put forward his imaginatively constructed theories in the article "Evangelien," *TRE X*, 1982, 570-626 (above all 600-612), as the summary of about two hundred years of critical study of the Gospels. Here he refers above all to the investigations made by Gustav Volkmar, of which he has had a study made in a dissertation: B. Wildemann, *Das Evangelium als Lehrpoesie. Leben und*