

Praise for *Four Gospels, One Jesus?*

‘Richard Burridge helps us all to read the gospels discerningly, with an eye to the integrity of each text. Using critical method and literary sensitivity, he shows how the gospels are like portraits, yielding their unique artistic visions – the four “dispositions” of the Son of God. *Four Gospels, One Jesus?* is an invaluable resource for students and parish groups alike.’

Phillip Aspinall, Primate of the Anglican Church of Australia

‘This book should be on the bookshelves of anyone who is serious about understanding the gospels properly. Well written, engaging and informative, it has, rightly, become one of the classic texts in its field. You really cannot begin gospel study without it.’

Paula Gooder, Canon Theologian of Birmingham and Guildford Cathedrals

‘[Burridge] has produced a beautiful, readable overview of the four gospels, rich in symbols, highlighting the different and complementary portraits they paint of the central figure, whose biography they record. A book to buy and cherish.’ *Michael Green, Honorary Fellow of Wycliffe Hall, Oxford*

‘Here is an introduction to the gospels which, because it combines so well prayer and worship and scholarship, has a vitality and freshness about it which I find immensely appealing.’ *David Hope, former Archbishop of York*

‘*Four Gospels, One Jesus?* is rightly acclaimed as a classic. A distinctive line on gospel genre meets the four famous symbols for the Evangelists to create the finest introduction to the Christian faith. Burridge is the C. S. Lewis of Bible scholars.’

Ian Markham, Dean and President of Virginia Theological Seminary

‘*Four Gospels, One Jesus?* enables readers to experience afresh the colour and texture of all four gospels in their unity and their diversity. The book is well researched, well expressed and presented with new and invigorating insights. A must for the shelves of thinking Christians everywhere.’

David Moxon, Archbishop of Canterbury’s Representative to the Holy See and Director of the Anglican Centre in Rome

‘This is a lively, lucid exposition of the four Evangelists’ portraits of Jesus. The Evangelists’ distinctive emphases are set out with flair, imagination and theological sensitivity. Novices and old hands will read the gospels with new eyes . . . [A] considerable achievement: scholarly, yet accessible.’

*Graham Stanton, former Lady Margaret’s Professor of Divinity
University of Cambridge*

‘Richard Burridge has made erudite scholarship so wonderfully accessible. *Four Gospels, One Jesus?* is indispensable for anyone who wants a reliable guide to New Testament studies with a disarming light touch.’

Desmond Tutu, Archbishop Emeritus of Cape Town

‘Richard Burridge’s book packs an enormous amount into a relatively small space – solid scholarship, theological acumen, imaginative and sensitive interpretation, a real gift for the telling analogy, all grounded in a manifest passion for the gospels and their unique subject. It is very good to have a fresh edition of this indispensable classic, as learned as it is accessible.’ *Rowan Williams, Master of Magdalene College, Cambridge*

Reviews of *Four Gospels, One Jesus?*

‘The book is . . . worth taking slowly, following the references, and digesting. Those who use it this way will be rewarded.’ *Catholic Herald*

‘This is brilliant in the sense that it is fresh, exciting, challenging and mind-stretching . . . I haven’t met a dozen to touch it for imaginative, yet very readable, scholarship.’ *Christian Herald*

‘Burridge does an excellent job of making scholarly topics understandable.’ *Christian Librarian*

‘[Burridge] has succeeded admirably in making expert knowledge seem relevant and accessible to Christians untrained in their professional skills.’ *Church Times*

‘Time and again, this book delights the reader as it points out nuances of wording and presentation that are so often the clues to the gospel writer’s mind and to his response to the figure of Jesus.’ *Contact*

‘*Four Gospels, One Jesus?* is a noteworthy and engaging exploration, written for beginners and non-specialists in New Testament studies, of the questions that inevitably arise when students and laity first become aware that in the gospels we have not one unified, but four differing and distinct, portraits of the person who is the object of their concern . . . a skilled and masterly overview.’ *Expository Times*

‘[This book] is very accessible to the general reader and has a lightness of touch combined with a depth of scholarly insight . . . I offer [the author] my thanks for writing such an appealing and faithful study of the gospels.’ *London Link*

‘This is a book which can be read with profit by people wanting a good modern introduction to the gospels.’ *Methodist Recorder*

‘Esoteric in parts, devotional in intent, scholarly throughout. The book offers an intriguing read.’ *Reform*

‘There is a lot of common sense here. The whole adds up to a wholesome and informative book by a scholar one instinctively feels able to trust . . . Popularizing, in the best sense, is an art which too few biblical scholars practise, and even fewer do well. Richard Burridge is one of the favoured few.’ *Theology*

Four Gospels, One Jesus?

A symbolic reading

RICHARD A. BURRIDGE

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*For Rebecca and Sarah
that they might grow up
to read the four gospels
and love the one Jesus.*

*In memory of
Iris Joyce Burrige
4th May 1928–1st May 1994,
dearly loved and greatly missed.*

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Preface and Acknowledgements from the First Edition

‘I think you should read the gospels,’ my spiritual adviser pronounced, gazing into the roaring log fire as he swirled the golden liquid around his glass. It was a cold Christmas, and we were on retreat at Launde Abbey in the depths of Leicestershire. Uncomprehending, I stared at him; had he finally gone crazy? After all, I had just spent the best part of a decade researching the gospels for my doctorate and then revising it for publication as an academic monograph!

The next day, out for a brisk walk, I rounded a corner in a quiet valley, and the title, idea and chapter headings for this book fell out of the wintry sky. A couple of years passed, in which nothing much happened about the book – but I did read the gospels. Then, I was fortunate to be awarded some study leave, to teach and lecture in the United States of America, and to research and write this book.

At the end of my leave, away on retreat again (this time ‘in the loveable West on a pastoral forehead of Wales’, as Gerard Manley Hopkins wrote of St Beuno’s College), I reflected on the different lecture rooms and pulpits, libraries and studies where this material, begun and completed on retreat, had been composed, tested, and refined. Both contexts had been vital – for this book is an attempt to bridge the gap between the prayer cell and the seminar debate. I hope that the scholarly minded will accept the spirituality – for the gospels are not just dead, ancient texts, and that the spiritually inclined will study the scholarship – for God has given us minds. As a symbolic reading of the narrative portraits of Jesus in the four gospels based upon the best of recent scholarship, I hope it will appeal both to those beginning any form of theological study and also to the thinking Christian believer. For

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ease of reading, there are no footnotes in the text; annotated suggestions for further reading are provided at the end of the book. Bible quotations in the text are taken either from the Revised Standard Version, New Revised Standard Version, or my own translation from the Greek.

I am grateful to all those who helped through this period; I trust the reader will indulge a long list, for many have contributed in various ways. Thanks must begin with Dr David Harrison, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Exeter and Chairman of the Lazenby Trust, for granting me study leave and financial assistance, as well as to the British Academy for a Personal Research Grant, and for further grants from the St Luke's Foundation and from the Bishop Phillpotts Trust through the Dean and Chapter of Exeter Cathedral. I was deeply touched by the warmth and hospitality of all my American hosts, especially Professor E. Earle Ellis and the PhD Office of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, Texas; Professor Christopher Bryan of the University of the South, Sewanee, Tennessee, where we kept a memorable Easter; Professor Daniel Patte and Professor Mary Ann Tolbert at Vanderbilt University, Nashville; Professor D. Moody Smith and Dale Martin at the Divinity School, Duke University, North Carolina; Professor Philip Stadter and Pat Moyer at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill; Professor Ted Champlin and Professor John Gages at Princeton University, Professor Beverly Gaventa at Princeton Theological Seminary and Professor Dan Hardy at the Center for Theological Inquiry, Princeton; Professor Leander Keck of Yale Divinity School; Fr Peter Sullivan III of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Albany, New York; all the staff and students at General Theological Seminary, New York for a fascinating month in the Big Apple; Professor Richard Pervo at Seabury-Western Seminary, Chicago; and Professor David Aune of Loyola University, Chicago, for his kindness and continuing interest. I wish to thank all their colleagues and students who attended my lectures and seminars for their stimulating contributions and the many conversations, and I remember with profound gratitude all

who opened their libraries and studies, rooms and resources, homes and hearts.

Both before and after my leave, I was able to combine the worlds of preaching and scholarship through discussions with my fellow Chaplains at Exeter University, sermons in the University Chapel of the Holy Trinity, and my teaching in the Faculty of Arts. On my return from leave, I was invited to deliver the annual Boundy Memorial Lectures at the University in November 1993, using this material; I am grateful to all who attended for their enthusiasm and responses, which helped to mould the final form of this book. I have been helped by my colleagues in the Department of Theology, especially by Alastair Logan's keen-eyed reading of the typescripts, Ian Markham's endless enthusiasm, and Professor David Catchpole's rigorous scholarship. I wish to thank Ann Newcombe and Sally O'Shea, Chaplaincy and Departmental secretaries, for cheerfully accepting the extra burdens caused both by my leave and this work. I am grateful to Professor Leslie Houlden and my new colleagues at King's College, London, for covering the vacancy in the Dean's Office while I completed this book and my other commitments. I was delighted also to spend some of my leave back at University College, Oxford, for my research at the invitation of the Common Room and my former tutor Dr Christopher Pelling, who started my interest in classical biography so long ago. Jane and Tony Collins, of Collins & Collins Literary Agency, managed to combine our long-standing friendship with professional skill, despite being deluged with typescripts and late-night telephone calls. Philip Law at SPCK provided very helpful encouragement throughout the process. None of this would have been possible without the smiling support of Dr Christopher Southgate, friend and colleague in the Chaplaincy, who bore the pressure of the finals term in my absence; not being a poet myself, I cannot find words to express how much I appreciate his fellowship!

Finally, of course, my own family have not only borne the brunt of the hours spent away on research or at home in

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writing, but also provided the love which made it worthwhile. My wife, Susan, has proved the strictest of readers and the most loving of partners; without her, I could do nothing. I enjoyed being at home with my daughters, Rebecca and Sarah, during my leave – and missed them terribly when I was away; their enthusiasm for life and sheer sense of fun provided so much of the energy for the production of this book, and I gladly dedicate it to them.

Oh, and by the way, Gordon, I'm still reading the gospels . . .

Richard A. Burridge
The Feast of the Nativity, December 1993

Postscript

While this book was in its final stages of production, my mother died suddenly. Her love was ever constant, an intimation of the love of Jesus, while her own mother first taught me to read the gospels. She was proudly looking forward to the publication of this book; may it be a worthy tribute to her memory.

R.A.B.

Preface to the Revised Edition

I am constantly amazed and humbled by the impact which this little book seems to have had over the last ten years since it was first published. It has been reprinted a number of times on both sides of the Atlantic and sells all around the world. The fact that sales remain fairly stable as year follows year suggests that it is still being recommended annually as a textbook in colleges and courses – and this is borne out by the many comments and messages I receive from students and teachers. Often when I go to conferences in Britain and in the USA, people will spot my name badge on my lapel and come up to talk about their use of the book with me, and this is always exciting and encouraging for an author. I also do a lot of public speaking, preaching and lecturing on training days across the country, and it is still a thrill that people turn up clutching well-thumbed copies for me to sign! If it has helped people to understand the gospels, particularly those who teach and preach about them, then I am very happy.

So I have prepared this new revised edition in response to all the many reviews and reactions over the years in order to update certain aspects of the original text, written over a decade ago, with thanks to everyone who has encouraged me with it along the way. The main changes have been to include some discussion of the growing new method of ‘reception history’, to take account of the adoption of the *Revised Common Lectionary*, to include reference to Peter Jackson’s *The Lord of the Rings* movies and a general update in the light of developments in scholarship, especially about the historical Jesus, in the last decade.

I am particularly grateful to my publishers, Ruth McCurry at SPCK and Sam Eerdmans of Wm B. Eerdmans in the

USA, for their continuing promotion of the book and for their willingness to produce this revised edition. The many universities and colleges, seminaries and training courses, schools and cathedrals, bishops and professors, friends and colleagues who have invited me to speak about the book and its material are now far too many to list – but I am grateful to you all, and treasure my memories of so many visits and talks. The first edition came out just as I started a new ministry as Dean of King's College, London – and I am still here; it is the support and friendship of my colleagues in the Dean's Office, Chaplaincy and Theology Department as well as across the rest of the college which keeps me going and both permits and inspires me to continue writing and publishing. As mentioned in the original Preface, the burden of this falls chiefly upon one's family, so I wish to stress again my thanks to Sue for all her love and support and renew the book's dedication to Rebecca and Sarah who have grown so much and now start to face the wider world themselves.

Richard A. Burridge
The Feast of St Barnabas
11th June, 2004

Preface to the SPCK Classics Edition

It is hard to believe, looking back over more than twenty years, how the idea for this account of the four gospels' portraits of Jesus first came to me and how the chapters almost seemed to write themselves. Yet its impact through the different editions and translations across the two decades has been both extraordinary and humbling. I am so grateful to the countless people on many continents who have told me stories about its effect on them – and especially to Philip Law, editor of the original edition, for celebrating his return to SPCK by suggesting this SPCK Classics edition. I owe a particular debt of gratitude to those who have supplied commendations for this book – which I have found very moving. As a 'classic', we have left the text the same as in the revised second edition, but I have refreshed and updated the suggestions for further reading at the end of the book. I continue to pray for Rebecca and Sarah, and for those who pick up this book, that we may all grow in understanding the four gospels so that we may love and follow the one Jesus.

Richard A. Burridge
The Feast of All Saints
1st November, 2012

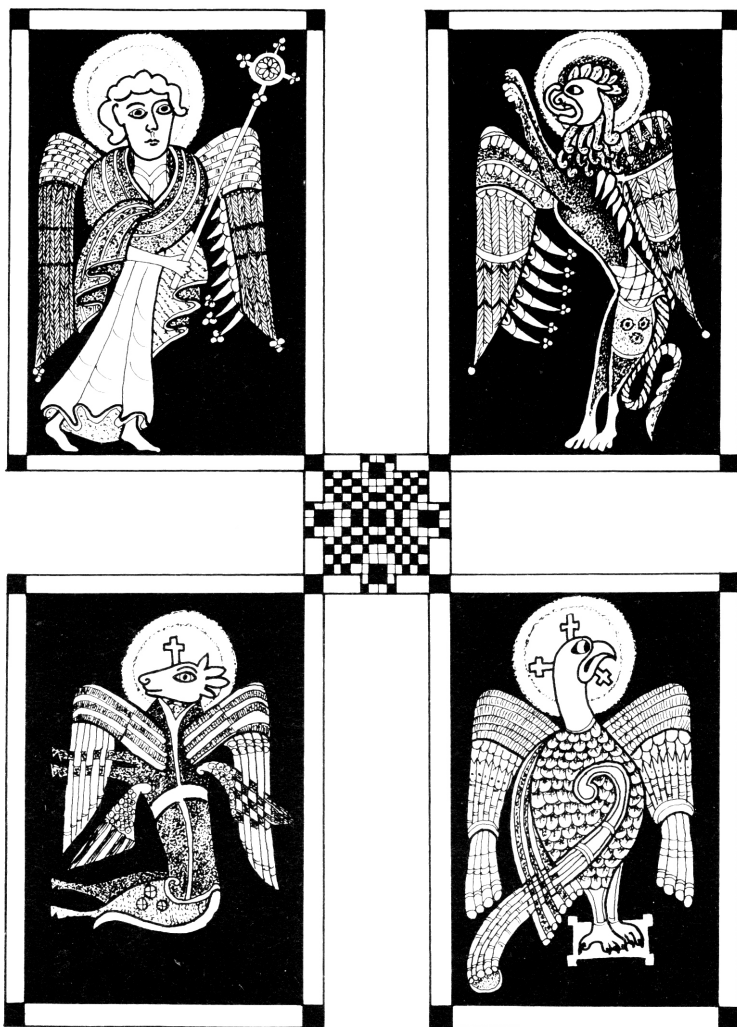


Figure 1 The four symbols of the gospels
The Book of Kells, Folio 27V

Four Gospels, . . .

Four portraits

Deep in the heart of the Kent countryside, perched on the side of a gentle hill sloping from the Downs to the flat plain of the Kentish Weald, is a large country house. Chartwell, as it is known, was the country home of Sir Winston Churchill from 1922 until his death. Now belonging to the National Trust, the house reveals much of the man who was Britain's Prime Minister during the dark days of the Second World War. The walls are hung with many photographs and portraits, some of which are his own work as a painter, and some the work of others who attempted to catch, by camera or by brush, something of the character of this great man.

Here is a picture of the statesman in conference with his allies, including President Roosevelt. His face is grim and determined, for the fate of the world rests upon those shoulders. He is dressed soberly, in a dark suit and tie, but he holds a cigar in his right hand. In the background, colleagues, assistants, and secretaries keep a discreet distance, clutching papers. Serious and fateful work is afoot.

Around the corner, another picture: a painting, done by Churchill himself of the very room in which we stand, except that the room was then host to a happy family gathering. It is 'Tea-time at Chartwell, 29 August 1927'. Churchill is casually dressed, smiling at friends and family around the table. It is an ordinary family at tea – and the cares of the world do not obtrude.

Along a corridor we come upon a picture of the man at war: he rides in a camouflaged car, while uniformed men mill all around him. He too wears uniform, for this is an

