“Will the Real Jesus Please Stand Up?”:
Understanding the Different Portraits of Jesus in the Gospels

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This series of five lectures explores how the writers of the four canonical Gospels “tailors” their portrait of Jesus in order to meet the pastoral needs of their particular communities. Gaining insight into how each of the Gospels tells the story of Jesus for a particular community not only assists us in becoming better readers of the Gospels but offers new opportunities for enhancing our faith in Jesus the Christ.

Lecture 1: What are the Gospels? Why are there Four?
Lecture 2: Mark’s Jesus: The Suffering Servant Messiah
Lecture 3: Matthew’s Jesus: Emmanuel and the New Moses
Lecture 5: John’s Jesus: The Word Made Flesh
The Three Christological Questions

(1) “What is Jesus?”
-- Ontological question (creedal, doctrinal)
-- Councilial Definition (Nicea—325 CE; Chalcedon 451 CE)

(2) “How Does Jesus Save?”
-- Soteriological question
-- No Councilial Definition to date !?!?!
-- Multiple “Atonement” theories: Athanasius’ Divinization, Anselm’s Satisfaction, Reformers’ Substitutionary, (neo-)Abelard’s Exemplar

(3) “Who is Jesus?” (Mk. 8:9, Mt. 16:15, Lk. 9:20)
-- Historical/vocational/identity question (Modern Question)
-- No Councilial definition to date
-- Historical-Critical Biblical Exegesis (‘43, ‘64, ‘65, ‘93)
-- Quests for the Historical Jesus (3rd Quest: N.T. Wright, J.P. Meier)
From “Jesusology” to Biblical Christology

• Sequel to “Encountering the Historical Jesus Today” (October 2013)
• “Jesusology”
  --Prolegomena to Biblical Christology
  --Provides Historical Context for Biblical Christology
• “A text without a context is pretext for a proof text” (D.A. Carson’s father)
• Jesus of History (pre-Easter, earthly) vs./& Christ of Faith (post-Easter, exalted) Problem
Traits of Narrative Biblical Christology

- Jesus = both a historical person and a character in a story
- Fact/Fiction dichotomy: Ancient vs. Modern Sensibilities
- “Truth is best revealed through story” (Hauerwas)
- “Fiction is the lie through which we tell the truth.” (Camus)
- “All stories are true, some of them actually happened.” (J. Markey ?)
Lecture 1: What are the Gospels? Why are there Four?

I. Characteristics of the Gospels

II. Why Four Gospels? Whither One Gospel?
   A. The Marcion Controversy & the Formation of the Canon
   B. Tatian and the Origins of the Diatesseronic Imagination
   C. The Synoptic “Problem”: Two-Source Theory/Markan Priority

III. Community-Contextual Reconstruction Hermeneutic

IV. Preview of Coming Attractions: Gospel of Mark
I. Characteristics of the Gospels

...straddle the world between the oral and written

...unique literary genre; no precedent, no antecedent

...historical-like and realistic; actual historical people and places but not biographies/journalistic accounts

...fictional stories without fantasy (no mythical beasts or fantastic tales)

...simultaneously both Myth (create a world) and Parable (subvert a world)

...are literature (intuitive & artistic), not treatises (inferential & rational) that employ sophisticated literary devices (foreshadow, irony, intercalation, chiasms)
I. Characteristics of the Gospels

...told in light of the Paschal Mystery (post-Easter Jesus)

....Passion narratives with anecdotal and introductory material (e.g. hymns, genealogies, parables, miracle and pronouncement stories, discourses)

... have the purpose/agenda to “evangelize,” “make disciples,” by addressing the pastoral needs of particular communities for which they are written

.....are written “in order to challenge those who claim to follow Jesus to come to terms with any ambivalence which continues to mar their relationship with Him.” (D. Gelpi)

.....internal not external documents; written by-for-in a particular community

...communal authors, anonymous, edited/redacted // Hollywood film
I. Characteristics of the Gospels

...deeply Jewish; Story of Jesus (Yeshua Mashiach) = Story of Israel

...Exodus of Jesus (Paschal Mystery) // Exodus of People of Israel

...OT = Original Covenant; NT = Restoration of the Covenant

...cannot be understood apart from the Hebrew Scriptures, especially the Exodus, Duetero-Isaiah (Suffering Servant Psalms--Isiah 53:12ff)
Why Four Gospels? Whither One Gospel?
II. Why Four Gospels? Wither One Gospel?
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A. The Marcion Controversy & the Formation of the Canon

--Marcion (c. 8 –160) wealthy (shipping) son of a bishop; heresiarch
--Christian Gnostic; Spirit/Matter Dualism
--ditheism = NT Heavenly Father (spirit) vs. OT Demiurge (matter)
--Marcion’s “canon” = Lk Gospel (redacted)+ 10 Pauline Letters
---no Hebrew Scriptures or any reference to Judaism
--origins of supercessionist and anti-Semiticism (anti-Jewish)
--catalyst for Christian canon (170- 367) = OT + 4 Gospels +23 other
--incredible plurality and diversity in Christianity’s Bible
II. Why Four Gospels? Wither One Gospel?

B. Tatian and the Origins of the Diatesseronic Imagination

--Tatian (20 – 180) = Syrian Christian convert
--pupil of Justin Martyr, 1st Christian Apologist
--composed the *Diatessaron* (“through the four”) = a "harmony" or synthesis of the four Gospels into a combined single narrative
--"Diatesseronic Imagination" = common tendency to “cut n’ paste” the words and action of Jesus from the Gospels without considering the differences in each Gospel
--vitiates the literary integrity of each Gospels
II. Why Four Gospels? Whither One Gospel?

C. The Synoptic “Problem”: Two-(Four-)Source Theory & Markan Priority

--historical-critical method of exegesis, mid-19th century Germany
--form, source, redaction, and social-scientific criticism,
---Mark = Gospel “Template”
--Mt contains 90% of Mk; Lk contains 50% of Mark
--235 verses similar in Mt. and Lk not in Mk = Q(uelle)
III. Community-Contextual Hermeneutical Approach

Q: How does one account for the differences in the Gospels?
A: (hypothesis): They are written/“tailored” in order to meet the pastoral needs/issues for a particular communities.

Maxim for Interpretation: “A text w/out a context is pretext for a proof text”

Three “Worlds” of a Text (Schneiders):

1. **World Behind the Text** = Original Context (e.g. extra-biblical attestation, e.g. Josephus, ancient historiography, archeology)

2. **World of Text** = Literary devices (symbolism, foreshadowing, parables, chiasms, irony, intercalation, metaphor, dramatic and allusive linkages)

3. **World in front of the Text** = Our Context (socio-political, history, and cultural realities and issues)
III. Community-Contextual Hermeneutical Approach

Hypothetical Reconstruction of the Community via “the Hermeneutical Circle”

Gospel Text

“World of the Text”

“World Behind the Text”

Gospel

Community

Context
III. Community-Contextual Hermeneutical Approach

Analog of Context to Context

Gospel Community Context
“World Behind the Text”

Gospel Text
“World of the Text”

Contemporary Context(s)
“World in Front of the Text”

analog
IV. Preview of Coming Attractions: Gospel of Mark

A. Historical Background:
Time: 65 – 73
Place: Palestine or Rome
Community: Survivors of Roman Persecution/Nero’s Scapegoating

B. Major Themes in Mark (Powell)
1. Very Human Portrait of Jesus
2. Centrality of the Cross
3. “Messianic Secret”
4. Proclamation of the Kingdom
5. Failure of the Disciples

Assignment: Read the Gospel of Mark and see how what we know about the historical context and major textual themes aid in formulating a hypothetical reconstruction of the Markan community and its issues/temptations/struggles.