

Introductory to the Exhibition in Oxford

'Seeing the New Testament for what it is: □ ... □'

Rev Dr David G Palmer, 7.30pm Thursday, 19th March 2015

INTRODUCTION:

I am grateful to the people of Wesley Memorial Methodist Church for the opportunity of mounting this Exhibition and Display here. It's only the second venue of my two-year tour of the country. (I launched last month in Leicester. My next stop is Cambridge, in April. In June I'll be at the Methodist Conference in Southport, in August at Greenbelt and in September in Edinburgh where my exhibition will coincide with the Annual Conference of the British New Testament Society of which I am a member. Other venues currently are being planned. I will complete my tour in my home town of Hull, City of Culture 2017.)

This being the first day of my exhibition here in Oxford, I will use my talk to introduce the exhibits. In a few minutes, therefore, I'll be moving around.

At the outset I want to say something about my artwork. Please judge it, not for my brushwork, but for what each artwork communicates to you about the New Testament book it represents. As an Architect I did produce drawings that gave instruction on how buildings *were to be built*. Now as a New Testament researcher I am using paintings to show how the books of our faith *were built*.

As regarding my choice of colour palates for my presentations, you may be able to discern that I have chosen:

- a desert palate for Mark's Gospel,
- a royal palate for Matthew,
- a rainbow palate for Luke and Acts,
- a countryside palate for John, and
- a fire palate for the Revelation.

To represent the contents, first of all, of Mark's Gospel, I developed creamy white cameos and imposed them on a meaningfully constructed, colour-coded background. I was able to repeat the same approach for the Revelation. But for the other presentations, I had to give up the pictures for printing. (I have my pen and ink drawings, from 1989, of Matthew, Luke-Acts and John to work with, but no one ever looked long enough at them to interpret them, so I didn't think they were worth replicating.) I lost something, therefore, in the art, but gained a lot of clarity in what I wanted to put over. Grayson Perry, I think, would be pleased with me!

In the background to this presentation is a story of research that began for me in Cambridge in the Lent Term of 1982 as I prepared for ordination as a Methodist Minister. It was at the Divinity School there that I discovered I didn't have to give up being an Architect!

Exhibition: 'Seeing the New Testament for what it is: □ ... □'

Talk: 'The New Testament seen afresh!'

Clearly, I mean 'seeing'/'seen' in the two senses:

as **visualising**, in this case, the twenty-seven books of the New Testament;
and as **understanding** something, perhaps for the first time, of what each book is!

1) How has the New Testament been seen up till now? This is our first question.

We go back, first of all, to the Early Church Fathers, 150 to 325 CE. They held to the view that the writings of the New Testament had very little at all to do with the Hellenistic writings that preceded them.

The Early Church Fathers themselves were steeped in classical rhetoric and literature, as well as the Bible, but they show that they struggled to know how to relate the Bible and particularly the New Testament to the rules and practice of classical writing. Rather, they set classical rhetoric and Biblical literature in opposition to each other and celebrated the superiority of Christianity over paganism, arguing for the 'simplicity of the Bible' over and against the 'ornamentation of classical literature'. The Bible was not to be thought of as literature.

Origen: 'It was not any power of speaking or any orderly arrangement of their message, according to the arts of Grecian dialectics or rhetoric which was in them the effective cause of converting their hearers... (**'Against Celsus, the Ante-Nicene Fathers'**, CLIC, 1985 Vol.4).

Jerome (Letters XXII, 29): 'How can Horace go with the Psalter, Virgil with the Gospels, Cicero with the apostles?' (He first concerns himself with the lyric, then with the epic/narrative, and finally with rhetoric/epistle/essay.)

Augustine, Confessions, III.5: when he first looked into the Bible, it seemed to him that the scriptures were 'unworthy to be compared to the stateliness of Tully; for my swelling pride shrunk from their lowliness.'

I put it to you that, since 325 (and the Council of Nicaea), these views of the Church Fathers have been highly influential. But for a little wobble, maybe, 180 years ago this year (we'll turn to this later), New Testament scholarship has been *convinced* that its literature was 'new literature'; that it was not like the old literature of the Hellenists, the Greeks. Yet in Augustine's *On Christian Doctrine*, IV.6-7, he addresses the Bible's use of rhetoric and style and discerns examples of 'the laws of eloquence' laid down by classical rhetoric. He also argued that literary form and meaning were inseparable. (See: *The Literary Guide to the Bible*, Eds. Robert Alter & Frank Kermode, Wm Collins, London, 1987 and *A Complete Literary Guide to the Bible*, Eds. Leland Ryken & Tremper Longman III, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1993: both these books demonstrate that biblical scholars have lagged behind their literary colleagues in recognising the roles of earlier writing rules.)

I turn now to Rev J.N. Sanders, Dean of Peterhouse College, Cambridge who wrote possibly just before 1962, on 'the Literature of the New Testament' for **Peake's** single volume **Bible Commentary**. I do so because his essay did two things: it well reflected the views of earlier generations and it *groomed* future generations to believe the same.

'The New Testament can hardly be considered as literature at all, except in the most general sense of the term....,'he says.

'The aesthetic motive and the desire to produce fine writing as something worthwhile in itself are foreign to its authors whose aims were urgent and practical....

Lk 1.1-4 echoes the cadences and repeats *the conventional claims of the Hellenistic historians*, but there the resemblance ends....

Their comparative indifference to pagan literature was on the whole an advantage to the writers of the New Testament. They gained thereby in freshness and *freedom from stale conventions and artificial rhetoric*. They were *not conscious literary artists, obeying a convention and imitating the correct models, like Hellenistic authors*, but rather practical men falling into familiar forms when these happened to provide them with effective means of expression....

The *Literature of the New Testament is in the main something new.*'

On *speeches and sermons*, Sanders admits that Thucydides put speeches into the mouths of his principal personages at appropriate moments and so '*set an unfortunate precedent*', but that Luke didn't follow the precedent.

And on *artistic/sculptural representations of literature*, he notes that samples exist where artists reproduced Hellenistic themes: he gives the example of Orpheus charming the beasts - as the pattern for Christ the Good Shepherd.

All of the above is in the article in **Peake's** (single volume) **Commentary on the Bible**, first published in 1919, but then completely revised in 1962, under the editors Matthew Black and H.H. Rowley, and reprinted in 1962, 63, 64, 67, 72, 75, 76 and 77 (at least). I must have bought my copy of Peake's, the one I'm quoting from, in 1977, as it was recommended then by the Local Preachers' Department of the Methodist Church of Great Britain. [I've read recently that it has been produced as a paperback by Routledge in 2001, but I've not seen a copy and I don't know if it has been revised much, if at all.] This Commentary has had a huge influence in the last century. Now, it seems, it is the turn of the **Oxford Bible Commentary** (2001) and **Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible** (2003). But look inside them both, for informed essays on the Literature of the New Testament and you will be disappointed. There are no such essays, never mind informed ones!

We summarise then: the New Testament has been seen by main stream scholarship as 'new literature' that has had very little at all to do with the Hellenistic writing that pre-dated it. I now move on to my next question:

2) Is there any evidence to persuade us of a contrary view?

Yes, my exhibition! My exhibition today is all about exploding the *myth* (here meaning 'the lie') that the New Testament *is new literature*. The evidence stacks up! And it is found in the Greek texts of each New Testament book. In fact, the evidence is so good that I am going to stick my neck out and suggest that, in the future, scholars will be able to agree on the literary descriptions of every book and the literary purposes of every author!

In the technical sense, we are handling *old literature*, Hellenistic, Graeco-Roman, Ancient Rhetoric, Classical Greek writing.

We tour the exhibits. As we examine the evidence presented in art-form, we will challenge **the consensus and currents of biblical scholarship**. What we do now is really quite subversive!

1) I John (first investigated by me in 2003), because, as an artwork, it tells all! (*Refer to the littleredhensheet copies for everyone?) It is useful for seeing how parsing and rhetorical analysis works and how it takes account of the rules of ancient classical Greek rhetoric, regarding Idea, Structure, Style, Memory and Presentation.

2) The Revelation to John (first investigated by me in 1986 in the USA)

Scholarship acknowledges that the Revelation to John has a number of Series, or Sections, that are made up of 'sevens', but as for an overall scheme there is not one only that it can identify.

By parsing and rhetorical analysis, by reading the Greek text in the same disciplined way as a First Century reader, it can be established that the rhetor presented his work in a symmetrical scheme: it included a Prologue and a balancing Epilogue around a chiasmatically presented series of Seven Sections, 1,2,3,C,3',2',1' (after the menorah?) where each Section consists of an Introduction and Seven Parts.

3a) Luke's Central Section (first investigated by me in the Cambridge Lent Term, 1982)

In Luke-Acts, scholarship sees a major break in the Gospel of Luke at 9.51. This is so, even to the extent of issuing commentaries in two volumes, two halves!

Major divisions number **ten** in both books of Luke's writing. The 'patron of artists' shows himself to be *the* literary artist of all the New Testament writers: both books comprise a chiasm of eleven sections, each: 1,2,3,4,5,C,5',4',3',2',1'. (Note too, the structure of 1-5,C,5'-1' is used three times over in the Gospel: in the central section itself, the gospel as a whole and in the genealogy of 'eleven sevens'.)

9.43b begins the long Central Section, not 9.51.

Furthermore the two books, Luke and Acts, parallel each other: Luke's message is that the life of Jesus is lived over again in the life of the Church which is brought to birth through the Spirit and sustained by the Spirit through every kind of challenge, including arrests, trials and even deaths.

3b) Luke's Prologue, Luke/Acts (first investigation completed August 1983)

Lk 1.1-4 is a carefully constructed Prologue, a three-part *protasis* followed by a three-part *apodosis*.

As a three-part *protasis* followed by a three-part *apodosis*, 1.1-4, the Prologue of Luke's Gospel indicates to the reader what he (she?) can expect throughout the work. The promise is that it is carefully 'ordered' (see 1.3). Fascinatingly, in Luke's Gospel, Sections 3 and 3' comprise threesomes of pieces. For example in 3' the units are 'three denials', 'three trials' and 'three rejections', where the structures of 'the denials' and 'the rejections' parallel each other. The opposite Section 3 contains three moral instructions (of John the Baptist), three trials/testings for Jesus and three 'rebukings' of Jesus. Additionally, Section 4 comprises foursomes of parts. See: four pairs of stories, four blessings and woes, eight commands, four central statements, eight commands with promises attached, four parables of blessing and woe, and four more pairs of stories, where the stories boarder a central sermon, and where all hangs together on the theme 'from sinners to disciples' with the Law and the Prophets being fulfilled at the same time, and after Mt.7.12. (The *sitz-im-leben* of Luke's thematic teaching here, for the whole of Section 4, is this single verse from Matthew's Gospel.) We can be 'rid of Q' (I half-quote Austin Farrer and reference his challenge of the early 1950s).

4) Mark's Prologue (first investigation completed August 1983)

The Prologue to Mark's Gospel is 1.1-13.

The Prologue to Mark's Gospel is a three part presentation in the form of ABB', where A is introductory, B is a first development and B' is a second and concluding development. These A, B and B' parts also comprise three parts in the same style, ABB'. Further, each of these parts comprise three parts, which can be expressed as abb'. The overall limits of the Prologue are 1.2-20. 1.1 is the separate abb' title (so Codex Sinaiticus) to the whole work.

Scholarship defines the narrative of Mark's Gospel as beginning at 1.14 and continuing to 16.8, but it cannot establish the narrative's structure. At 16.8, however, it says emphatically that there the book ends.

The narrative of Mark's Gospel begins at 1.21 and consists of Four Series of Seven Days. The two outer series correspond for contents and themes. The two inner series similarly correspond. The arrangement of the narrative is ABB'A': this is the simplest form of chiasm that is used in Hellenistic/ Graeco-Roman writing. Further, each Series consists of seven days that are arranged like the days of Homer's *Iliad* in the pattern, ABB'XABB' where X is the turning point in the *Iliad* and the turning point day in Mark's Gospel. (ABB'XABB' is in structural use in Homer, Mark, Matthew, John, I & II Corinthians and Jude.) Lastly for now, the requirement of this Markan drama was of an Epilogue (of three parts, ABB', for symmetry with the prologue): my proposal is that it is uncovered in the longer ending and is 16.9-16,19-20a. The break between 16.8 and 16.9 is exactly what one would expect to find between the ending of a narrative and the beginning of an epilogue. The absence of *kai* to begin sentences in the epilogue is entirely in accord with the counsel of Aristotle (see Aristotle on the rules concerning 'the Epilogue', *Ars Rhetorica*, *Aristotle on Rhetoric: a Theory of Civic Discourse*, tr. George A. Kennedy, Oxford University Press, New York/Oxford, 1991; there are plenty more translations).

5) Matthew's Prologue... (first investigation completed August 1983)

Matthew's Gospel opens with a 3 x 14 scheme of names.

Matthew's Gospel opens with a 3 x 14 scheme of names. The rhetor is signalling his interest in these numbers to his reader. He will use them again and again. He will disclose his interest also in 'five', for five times he will repeat the formula: 'And it came to pass when Jesus ended...'. These establish the concluding pieces to alternating Sections: 2, 4, C, 4', and 2'. 'Five' together with 'three' and 'fourteen' complete the overall book scheme. (That the Gospels of Matthew and Luke each have eleven sections in the arrangement, 1-5,C,5'-1', is something that the two books have in common. This hasn't been seen before.

This Manual of Christian Instruction is highly and tightly structured in three blocks of five times 14 pieces (units/pericopae). (Each block has its specific purpose in the overall scheme.) The writer is assisting the memorising of this instruction and it is likely that he intends the left hand to be used in the counting off of the parts with each part of the fingers (two of the thumb, three of each of the four fingers) and the right hand for counting off the 'fives' with the five fingers. (The Sumerians used similar finger counting in the market place.) There are just too many chiastic correspondences and too many *matrical* relationships (I'm creating a new word, *matrical*, meaning of a matrix), too many for them to be accidental. They are planned! I'm spelling it out! Note the common use of ABB'XABB' for the constructions in both Mark and Matthew (also in common with John, I Corinthians, etc, as above).

6) John's Prologue... (first investigation completed August 1983)

In John's Gospel, 1.1-18 is the Prologue, but scholarship will not commit itself to any one explanation of the Prologue's structural features, or that of the Gospel as a whole.

John's Gospel begins with a three-part presentation;

'In the beginning was the Word;
And the Word was with God;
And the Word was God.'

In this way, the rhetor informs the reader of the writing style that he uses throughout his work. Parsing and rhetorical analysis disclose that the Prologue itself is made up of three parts and that each of these pieces comprises three pieces. All follow the form ABB'/abb' (as introduced above). The rhetor establishes, mainly by his use of repeating introductory words ('On the next day...' three times to 'On the third day...') six whole presentations and then six more. He shows the reader that his Sections comprise 12 parts each. He goes on to disclose Seven Sections in all, in the ABB'XABB' arrangement (the same as that which is found in Mark's Gospel's Series, which comes in the first place from Homer's *Iliad*) and simultaneously in the 1,2,3,C,3',2',1' arrangement (which comes also from the *Iliad*). This analysis demonstrates that the six water jars feature in the *sixth* part of the gospel, that the thirty-eight year old man at the pool features in the 38th piece AND that the 153 large fish caught feature in the *eighty-third* part of the gospel: 'The Mission success will be with the Gentiles.' Isn't this the understanding of the '70' difference that is 'hidden' by the rhetor ('70' being the Gentile number)? (See also the Revelation for '666' and Acts for '276', both triangular numbers like 153 and both in noteworthy positionings in their texts. It doesn't pass my attention that the numbers '38' and '83' have their relationship too!)

At the centre of the gospel is the Feast of Dedication, the Feast of Lights: the menorah's dominance is not overlooked for the gospel plan. What is telling, too, is that at the centre of this central section we are asked to look back, just before the centre, to the activities beginning the first half of the gospel, and to look forward, just after the centre, to the activities beginning the balancing closing half of the gospel. There's a telling mention also of 'twelve hours of daylight' in the next piece, 'twelve' being the number of parts per section, meaning, 'the man who walks in this light of the gospel will not stumble'?

7) Romans (I began investigating the letters in 2003)

The big test surely is to see if we can now improve on the past great readings of this letter?

Structurally, the letter copies the Pentateuch for the form: 1,2,C,2',1'. Paul presents the New Law. For this we have to know the results of computer analysis in the 1980s by Orthodox Jews in Jerusalem and you have to read the Letter as a first century reader did. [With the Pentateuch, we have a five part chiasm where each section begins as follows: TWRH (49 letters between each letter of the word for law); TWRH (49 ditto); JHWH (7 letters between each); HRWT (49 letters between each letter); HRWT (48 ditto).] The construction of Romans reproduces that of the Pentateuch. The Letter mentions 'law' 73 times, much more than any other writing in the NT. (I'm unaware of anyone pointing this out before.) The centre establishes the key point: the old law has its replacement with the Law of the Spirit.

We may be shocked to find that Tertius (who wrote the last three pieces of the letter's original ending for himself) is no amanuensis, but rather a professional ghost writer who penned Paul's Letter to the Romans, giving it its structure and its style, and preparing it for both memorising and presenting! Paul was no professional writer; he tells us this when in closing a letter he refers to his own large lettering! (The NIV translation is misleading when it translates *ὁ γράψας τὴν ἐπιστολὴν*, 'the one writing *down* this letter'.)

CONCLUSION:

We shouldn't be so surprised, should we, to see these books as the products of Ancient Greek writing skills? These books were all *written in Greek*, so *why did we not think they were also written after the manner of Greek composition?* Why were scholars not open to this?

We go back in time again, but briefly in this conclusion, to the era of the Apostolic Fathers, 70 - 150 CE. Many of the New Testament writings were written during this period. Is there anything to be learnt from it? I think there is.

It was in this time that Christians and Jews around the Roman Empire began separating from each other to take up diametrically opposed positions. The causes for this are seen as the **Fire in Rome** in 64 CE, for which the Christians were blamed by the Emperor, and **the Fall of Jerusalem** with the destruction of the temple in 70 CE. Michael W Holmes puts it this way, 'The gradual closure of synagogues to Christians meant the loss of an important source of learned converts to the (early) church. From this point on (after 64 and 70) the intellectual focus of the church would shift increasingly toward the Greek philosophical tradition, from which a growing percentage of the more intellectually inclined converts was being drawn. Thus what began as a Jewish reform movement increasingly moved toward expressing its most fundamental tenets in terms drawn primarily from Greek philosophy' (p.10, Introduction to *The Apostolic Fathers*, Baker Academic, 2007).

The door opens here! The Greek New Testament writer brought to his task, his abilities, not just to write in Greek, but also to compose whole books to Classical Greek's writing rules, and besides these abilities, he brought also his understanding of Greek philosophy, myth and drama.

We can chart the New Testament writing periods and see both Jewish and Greek influences: **firstly**, there were Paul's Letters of the 50s: early Pauline Jewish writings formed of Greek literary influence; **secondly**, there were the gospels of the 70s and beyond: these were Greek writings that incorporated Pauline Jewish and other Jewish Midrashim/Old Covenant scriptures; and **thirdly**, there were the writings in the 80s and beyond (e.g. the letters of I and II Timothy, Titus and II Peter): these were writings that favoured the first set of writings over the second;

that rejected myth and mythological interpretation and warned against letting arguments over genealogies divide the church. (With Matthew's, Jesus begins the seventh seventh era; with Luke's Jesus begins the twelfth seventh era.)

In the Nineteenth Century, the tension seen between Peter and Paul (I Cor. 1 and Gal. 2) became a focus of attention for Baur, Strauss and the Tübingen School. The letters (of the 50s) were compared with the Acts of the Apostles (of the 80s) as they sought to understand the history of early Christianity. They characterised it as a struggle within the church between Petrine (Jewish) and Pauline (Gentile) factions. But the division the church suffered in the Nineteenth Century, was one that was expressed over the interpretation of the Gospels in particular. On the one hand there were the supernaturalists and on the other, the rationalists. Imagine then the furore when, 180 years ago this year, David Friedrich Strauss published his revolutionary third way (in *Das Leben Jesu: kritisch bearbeitet*, 2 vols., First Ed, Tübingen, 1835-36, Fourth Ed. Tübingen 1840; tr. George Eliot, *The Life of Jesus Critically Examined*, SCM Press London, 1973, p.782). The Gospels were not eye-witness accounts, but myths, 'mere myths', he said, and so attracted a furious response from all kinds of scholars (across the departments and disciplines of his University). Strauss suffered, along with his career.

By turning to a form critical approach, Tübingen scholars attempted to defend the gospels' historicity by establishing the *sitz-im-leben* of the units that made up the gospels: each piece had an earlier setting in life than the one in the texts. Earlier methodologies were reviewed and new ones developed, but nowhere, post 1835-36, is there indication of a renewal of interest in Classical Greek writing rules and Greek philosophy's use of myth. Then, Mark's Gospel was not thought to be the first gospel to be written: Matthew's was. Otherwise someone might have entertained the possibility in that century and at that time that the writer of Mark took Paul's understanding and theology (from I Cor. 5, 11 and 15?) and applied place names, days and times to what he found? (Note the times: '3', '6' and '9', so quartering 'the day' of Jesus' death like 'a night's four watches'.)

Homer's epics were clearly known to the first century writers, as to every reader and writer, and as to every non-reading but listening audience at that time. Homer's myths had their appeal. They had power. They worked! Furthermore, they had been well tried and tested by others as models for their own new works over several *centuries*. Myth may appear awkwardly to us to historicise events that were not historical, but in its usage in the Gospels it communicates what the writers wanted believers to know was eternal truth. Myth is not to be derogated in this context: let no one *today* say the Gospels are 'mere myth'! If the New Testament writers hadn't written as they did, to the classical rules of ancient rhetoric, would there have been a Christian faith to celebrate in the world today? No one would have shown the writings any respect if they hadn't met the expected standards, would they? And if they were not respected, would they have been preserved, copied and translated, or treasured, to the extent that people would be willing to die before they would deny their truth?

I come to some concluding questions and answers.

How did all this discipline for reading the New Testament drop off the radar of the church, and seemingly so early in its life? In short, Augustine (On Christian Doctrine, II, 11) tells us, 'As soon as anyone received a copy of a Greek manuscript, whether he was capable or not, he translated it into Latin.' It is the translating that killed the primary texts as refined communicators of the writer to the reader.

Can our liberation from false premises concerning New Testament Literature be celebrated without fear of losing our faith? I don't see why not! But reading practices and preaching practices will have to change, won't they, even as today's supernaturalists and rationalists will find it a challenge? And optimistically I want to say, isn't it just possible that others will be won over, who in the past have said, 'But that I can't believe,' and walked away? By evangelicals and charismatic Christians, would-be believers have been told that the gospels are histories! And by liberals, would-be believers have heard texts explained away. 180 years ago, a mythic interpretation of the gospels was offered as a new way of interpretation and it was rejected. That which is on offer today points us to a place where scholarship has never wanted us to go! To the ancient Greeks! It goes with knowing that in our hands is literary art in chiasm and matrix and that parsing and rhetorical analysis are essential to our reading discipline.

The supreme requirement of New Testament Studies has always been that of a purely literary analysis of its Books. It is to our shame that it has taken us nearly two millennia to get this far.

New Testament scholars today have a new mountain to climb. Though the way up is mapped out, it will be too much for those already on the peaks of other mountains; but it will be do-able by those with young legs!

And the church? Having placed its trusting hand in the hands of scholars over the years, it will be hard for it to acknowledge that it is, itself, both biblically naive and theologically naked, but, when it sees the New Testament Books afresh and for what they are, it will surely jettison the straight-jacket and discover a springboard!

For the discussion, following the introductory tour of the artworks....?

Over the years, there have been many attempts to affirm the Gospels as eye-witness report. One of the most recent is from **Richard Bauckham** (*Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, Michigan/Cambridge, 2006).

Bauckham judges Mark's Gospel to be the unadulterated and untreated historical jottings of one who has received his information from the apostle Peter. Throughout his book (pp. 203, 207, 217-221, 227-228, 410, 423-424, *et al*), he pleads for this view on the grounds that Mark did not create a Greek-type of 'history' that was unreliable, as he might have done if he himself were an eye-witness, a writer *and* a historian, because he gives no 'order' to the material he received. Mark's Gospel is Mark's jottings down of what he heard from Peter.

That Mark's Gospel is not in any *note form* is very clear to me. My artwork presents a lot of the evidence. My PhD work of the 1990s shows considerable support for a clearly structured matrix, where the author appears in every way to have been in control of his material *and* to have learned his trade from Homer and, for good reason, mimicked his compositional approach to the *Iliad*. The Gospel is about the beginnings of Christianity and about how it became a world religion. It is important for its stress on the eternal worth of believing and committing to Jesus. (The 'original' Epilogue is important here for these two conclusions, see 16.15,16.) And Jesus' death and resurrection is fundamental to this story of our salvation, says this writer. But it is what Paul had said before him. By telling his story of Jesus in 'four series' of 'seven days', he is the first ever (it seems) to put days and dates to Paul's thought (1Cor. 11.23-26; 15.3-5). For its meaning, our writer says Jesus' death is to be understood as associated (in thought) with the Passover (see also 1 Cor. 5.7). Hence, the new era begins at dawn on the first day of the new week that follows after the Passover. This is myth-making at its best, surely? Through Jesus' blood-shedding and death, God passes over the sins of those who believe Jesus to be the Christ and Son of God. It is powerful story-telling.

Though there is a tradition associated with Papias, that says Mark was not a disciple of Jesus, but of Peter who wrote down what he learned from Peter (according to the tradition of John the Elder and passed on, in about 130 CE, by Papias, Bishop of Hierapolis, and recorded by Eusebius in his *Historia Ecclesiastica* iii.39.15), this appears to have been the view of those who wanted in their day to read this Gospel as history. They appear to have known nothing of this book's literary form and the writer's literary task and endeavour. People could have told the story of a historical Jesus, that is, if they had lived till after 70 CE and moved away from Jerusalem before the slaughter, but even then, it seems, the early focus was on the Christ of faith. For this, Paul appears responsible (Paul shows great reluctance to surrender his Gospel in any way to Peter, Gal. 1.11-2.21). In his letters, we have bits and bobs in regard to Jesus' person, a last supper, a betrayal (though not at the hands of a disciple – the 'twelve' see him raised, I Cor. 15.5), his death, burial, resurrection and a likely ascension (Eph. 4.7-13), the 'twelve' disciples, mentions of scripture fulfilment and a firm belief in Jesus as the Christ Redeemer. It is these that have been gathered up in a single production here. Paul's writings, rather than Peter's reminiscences, gave the principal thoughts and details to this Good News.

In every way, this Gospel, exhibits indebtedness to the writing rules of ancient Graeco-Roman literature. My joy has been to discover, therefore, another who in parallel with me (but quite separately) had imagined himself to be the first to see a link between the Gospel of Mark and Homer. He introduces his thesis in the same way as I do, with the belief that readers of the Gospel of Mark had seen nothing of what they should have been seeing. Here, I refer to the work of **Dennis R.**

MacDonald (*The Homeric Epics and the Gospel of Mark*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 2000). His thesis is that Mark's Gospel is much influenced *for its content* by both Homer's *Odyssey* and the *Iliad*: in fact, he says Mark imitated the whole of the *Odyssey* for the Gospel and two books of the *Iliad*, Books 22 and 24, for the death of Jesus. Yet like **Bauckham**, he too demonstrates no knowledge of the Gospel's structure. Neither does he appear to show any interest in the structures of the *Odyssey* and the *Iliad*. Indeed, he shows no inkling that Mark's Gospel, for structure, imitates Homer's for the *Iliad* - four times over.

Both **Bauckham** and **MacDonald** have been much rewarded for their work, likewise also **Richard A Burridge** (*What are the Gospels? A Comparison with Graeco-Roman Biography*, Second Edition, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, Michigan/Cambridge, 2004). As a classics graduate, he transferred to theological studies and built a solid argument: the gospels in general were no longer to be viewed as *sui generis*; rather, they are Graeco-Roman Bioi (Lives, Biographies). First published in 1992, his doctoral work attracted much interest from those who did not have his advantage of studying classics. In 2004 he reproduced his earlier text (with some revisions) and added a chapter. The latter gave him his opportunity to deal with the earliest objections to his work and the chance to gather up the supportive comments of others. He was able also to record the new developments of others that were based on his work. It is disappointing, therefore, to find that he makes no reference to **MacDonald's** work (published in 2000), nor indeed also to **Mack's** (published in 1990) on Rhetoric and the New Testament.

There's no comfort for Bauckham in what I have been presenting, but there's much supporting evidence here in this exhibition for what both Burridge and MacDonald have been saying. I think DF Strauss would have been helped too, 180 years ago, if he had known then what we can know now.

For an introduction to Ancient Rhetoric, see:

Mack, Burton L., *Rhetoric and the New Testament*, Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 1990, pp.32-34 for the rules as such, particularly on Idea, Structure, Style, Memory and Presentation.

For much earlier instruction, see:

Aristotle, *Ars Rhetorica* (*Aristotle on Rhetoric: a Theory of Civic Discourse*, tr. George A. Kennedy, Oxford University Press, New York/Oxford, 1991; there are plenty more translations)

Cicero, *De Oratore*, 55 BCE: 'All energy and ability of the orator must apply to five steps: find the arguments (*inventio*); dispose them in logical order, by importance and opportunity (*dispositio*); ornate the speech with devices of the rhetoric style (*elocutio*); retain them in memory (*memoria*); expose the speech with art of grace, dignity, gesture, modulation of voice and face (*actio*). Before pronouncing the speech, it is necessary to gain the goodwill of the audience; then expose the argument; after, establish the dispute...'

Theon, Aelius, *Progymnasmata*. Writing mid to late 1st century CE, he is the author of a collection of preliminary exercises for the training of orators. ('The work, extant, though incomplete, which probably formed an appendix to a manual of rhetoric, shows learning and taste, and contains valuable notices on the style and speeches of the masters of Attic oratory,' *Wikipedia*.)

Who thought the work was done; that there was nothing left to do; and that there was nothing more we could do, anyway?! I take to the road to get *my message* across with my 'paintings'. My books and memorabilia are offered too in the hope that they may be used both to educate and to evangelise. Faith is best affirmed through truth, yes? And the 'truth' of rigorous enquiry is what we should be offering the world, isn't it? **Indeed, the meaning of the texts counts for so much more than the details through which they are conveyed. We can see how the texts function now as never before!**