**GRAECO-ROMAN BIOGRAPHY AND**

**THE GOSPELS’ LITERARY GENRE**

**ABSTRACT**

I am grateful for this invitation to speak, and for the honour of receiving the Ratzinger Prize. The purpose of this paper is to help set the Historical and Christological themes for this Symposium. There are three main parts to this lecture in this opening session. I begin with an initial consideration of the statement on the Bible from the Second Vatican Council, Dei Verbum, promulgated November 18th, 1965 and its implications for Ratzinger’s approach and for Pope Benedict’s biography of *Jesus of Nazareth*. The second section explains my original work on the literary genre of the gospels as biography, looking at previous scholarship from 19th century Romantic Lives of Jesus to Karl Ludwig Schmidt and Rudolf Bultmann and the rise of Form Critical approaches. In the 1960’s, the rise of Redaction Criticism restored the evangelists as theologians and writers and questions of the gospels’ overall genre start to be asked again, especially in the USA and in Britain. My own doctoral research analysed ancient and modern genre theory, and compared the generic features of the gospels with those of Graeco-Roman *Lives*, especially with regard to their biographical focus on the words and deeds of Jesus. The third section consider the later implications & consequences of this biographical genre for other areas of research, such as the non-canonical gospels, the absence of Rabbinic biographies, and the use of the gospels in ethical debate today. The gospels’ biographical genre requires a Christological focus on their four different portraits of Jesus of Nazareth, which has further implications for our consideration of Joseph Ratzinger/Pope Benedict’s biography of *Jesus of Nazareth.*

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