

Publisher's Foreword

This volume, titled *The Four Holy Gospels*, carries forward the legacy of the illuminated Gospel Book extending back nearly fifteen centuries. The oldest surviving Latin illuminated Gospel Book is the *St. Augustine Gospels* (also known as the *Canterbury Gospels*), which dates to the late sixth century. Exquisitely illuminated with portraits of each evangelist, miniature drawings, initial letters, and embellishments throughout, the *St. Augustine Gospels* was, according to reliable tradition, created in Italy and brought to England by St. Augustine in AD 597.

During the next one thousand years, the creation of illuminated Gospel Books was typically the highest form of art undertaken during this period. Richly illuminated Gospel Books, often embellished with gold leaf and brushed with gold specs, were created to glorify of God and were carried in procession, for the reading of the Gospel, during church worship services in both the East and the West.

In the later Middle Ages, however, the creation of Gospel Books gave way to richly illuminated devotional Books of Hours, exquisitely exemplified by the *Très Riches Heures du Duc de Berry* illuminated by the Limburg Brothers in the early fifteenth century. With the advent of printing and the publication of the Gutenberg Bible in 1455, the art of illumination declined rapidly. One of the last few Gospel Books created is the extravagantly decorated *Peresopnytsia Gospels* completed by a single scribe in a Ukrainian monastery in 1561.

With this historic background, Crossway is extremely grateful to artist Makoto Fujimura – one of the most highly regarded artists of this century – for his willingness to exercise his extraordinary gifts in the creation of this volume. Clearly no Gospel Book of this scope and brilliance has been executed by a single artist for more than four centuries.

Makoto Fujimura's art, as reproduced throughout *The Four Holy Gospels*, incorporates the following extensive range of Fujimura's work – five large scale paintings, including the frontispiece "Charis-Kairos (The Tears of Christ)" (62 x 90 inches), and four opening plates (48 x 60 inches), one for each of the four Gospels; eighty-nine initial letters, each painted (and many

adorned with gold flecks and foil) specifically for each chapter opening throughout the Gospels; as well as more than seventy individually painted illustrated reflections and embellishments, complementing the Gospel text on each two-page spread throughout the Gospels.

Similarly, both the leather-bound and cloth-bound covers of *The Four Holy Gospels* are adorned with a dramatic red foil and gold foil flourishes, representing the blood of Christ poured out on the cross (in red on the upper half), and the glory of God revealed in the four Gospels (in gold on the lower half).

The occasion for creating *The Four Holy Gospels* is the celebration of the four hundredth anniversary of the King James Version (KJV) Bible, published in 1611. As is widely recognized, no other book published in English during the last four centuries has had a greater spiritual and cultural impact on western culture than the KJV Bible.

It is fitting then, that the Bible text used in the creation of this volume is the English Standard Version (ESV) Bible, which is a direct descendent of the KJV Bible. First published in 2001, the ESV carries forward the classic Bible translation legacy – the legacy which originated in the Tyndale New Testament (1526), was established by the KJV Bible (1611), and was carried forward by the subsequent Bible editions of the American Standard Version (1901) and the Revised Standard Version (1954). With this legacy as the foundation, the ESV Bible (2001) reflects the same commitment to the beauty and majesty of the original languages seen in these earlier Bible translations, while also incorporating the most recent scholarship carried out by more than one hundred scholars from numerous nations and denominations around the world.

The purpose in creating *The Four Holy Gospels* is first and foremost to give praise and glory to the triune God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – Who is the sole source of creativity, both of the four Gospels and of the eternal world-transforming Gospel itself. Thus it is fitting to create the highest level of art – to adorn, complement, and “illuminate” the text of the four Gospels – as an act of awe, reverence, and worship. As summarized by Makoto Fujimura: “I can do nothing to enhance the Word of God. I can only tremble at the expanse of vision that the Word of God led me to during my work on this project. This vision is a luminal space that, in recent times, imagination has rarely approached. We are invited by our Creator to enter that space, an invitation which is extended to anyone desiring to journey there. My hope then is that this project will be merely the beginning of creative imagination – of being drawn to God’s expansive generative Reality.”

It is with this vision that Crossway and the artist, Makoto Fujimura, offer this volume of *The Four Holy Gospels*, to all people who love and treasure the Gospels and the Gospel itself – for the praise and worship of the triune God. *Soli Deo Gloria* – to God alone be the glory.

Lane T. Dennis, Ph.D.
President and Bible Publisher
Crossway