

## THE ORDER OF THE BOOKS OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

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This article follows up two earlier articles on the order of the biblical books in the Hebrew and Greek arrangements of the OT canon.<sup>1</sup> The assumption behind all three studies is that the placement or location of a biblical book relative to other books influences a reader's view of the book. The present study deals with the location of the books of the NT, with "location" defined as physical propinquity in the anthology of Scripture.<sup>2</sup> Readerly habit views enjambment as a clue that significant relations are to be discerned between a particular book and its neighbors in the library of canonical books. The reader presumes that material that is juxtaposed is related in some way in meaning, and this habit of readers forms the basis of the following analysis. The assumption is that a book is more closely related to books next to it or nearby, and less closely related to books placed far from it. This study is not a historical investigation into the formation of the canon of the NT,<sup>3</sup> but an exploration of the hermeneutical implications of the order of biblical books, with book order viewed as an aspect of the paratext of Christian Scripture.

### I. A PARALLEL STRUCTURE TO THE OLD TESTAMENT?

The overriding principle of organization discerned within the NT canon is the ordering of the books according to an ancient perception of genre, so that they are grouped as Gospels, Acts, letters, and Revelation (apocalypse). The suggestion has been made that the familiar canonical order parallels that of the Greek OT (exemplified by Vaticanus),<sup>4</sup> so that the Gospels correspond

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<sup>1</sup> "The Order of the Books in the Hebrew Bible" *JETS* 51 (2008) 673–88; "The Order of the Books in the Greek Old Testament," *JETS* 52 (2009) 449–66.

<sup>2</sup> Pierre Bayard uses the term "location," see *How to Talk about Books You Haven't Read* (trans. Jeffrey Mehlman; London: Granta Books, 2007) 11: "what counts in a book is the books alongside it," namely how a book is situated relative to other books, and he makes use of the analogy of a library.

<sup>3</sup> For a recent discussion relevant to the present study, see Larry W. Hurtado, "The New Testament in the Second Century: Text, Collections and Canon," in *Transmission and Reception: Critical and Exegetical Studies* (Text and Studies 3/4; ed. J. W. Childers and D. C. Parker; Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias, 2006) 3–27, especially pp. 19–24, where Hurtado discusses the first appearance of certain canonical groupings.

<sup>4</sup> David Trobisch attributes this arrangement according to genre to an editorial desire to reflect the generic principle of ordering used in the Greek OT (*The First Edition of the New Testament* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000] 63–64).

to the Pentateuch, Acts to the Historical Books, the letters to the Poetic Books, and Revelation to the Prophetic Books.<sup>5</sup> The parallel between the Gospels and Pentateuch can be argued on the basis that the Gospels are composed as biographies of Jesus Christ<sup>6</sup> and the Pentateuch as the biography of Moses.<sup>7</sup> Just as the life of Jesus Christ is foundational for Christian revelation, so the revelation of God's law framed by "the life of Moses" forms the foundation of the rest of the OT. God's act of salvation in Christ has the same foundational significance for Christians as the event of the exodus had for Israel (cf. Luke 9:31: "his departure [τὴν ἔξοδον αὐτοῦ], which he was to accomplish in Jerusalem") so the Gospels are rightly put at the head of the NT. If Acts is construed as a history of the early church, recounting the successful spread of the gospel message, it bears an obvious relation to the potted history of Israel provided by Joshua–Esther. The General Letters and the Letters of Paul, like the Poetic Books, deal with current issues and perennial concerns,<sup>8</sup> and the ethical orientation (e.g. Romans 12–15; Ephesians 4–6; 1 Peter) and wisdom content (e.g. James) of the letters support the parallel being drawn. The book of Revelation, viewed as a prophecy (see esp. Rev 1:3), draws much upon the prophetic books of the OT, and Daryl D. Schmidt sees it as saturated with prophetic septuagintalism.<sup>9</sup>

A comparison can also be made, however, between the order of NT books and the tripartite Hebrew Bible (Torah-Prophets-Writings).<sup>10</sup> The first five

<sup>5</sup> See the tentative suggestion made by Roger Beckwith (*The Old Testament Canon of the New Testament Church and Its Background in Early Judaism* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985] 184). He views the parallels as an argument in favor of his view that the Greek ordering of the OT books is of Christian origin.

<sup>6</sup> For a recent defense of the Gospels as a subtype of Greco-Roman biography, see Richard A. Burridge, *What Are the Gospels? A Comparison with Graeco-Roman Biography* (2d ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004) 105–251; cf. Justin Martyr's 15 references to the "memoirs of the apostles" (ἁπομνημονεύματα τῶν ἀποστόλων, *1 Apol.* 67.3; *Dial.* 106.3 etc.) that appear to be a harmony of the Synoptic Gospels, see Craig D. Allert, *Revelation, Truth, Canon and Interpretation: Studies in Justin Martyr's Dialogue with Trypho* (Vigiliae Christianae Supplements 64; Leiden: Brill, 2002) 187–220.

<sup>7</sup> The Pentateuch has two major generic sections, namely Genesis and Exodus–Deuteronomy. Genesis is to be taken as an "introduction" to the whole Pentateuch. The genre of the larger section, Exodus–Deuteronomy, is that of biography, specifically, the biography of Moses, commencing at his birth and ending with his death (Rolf P. Knierim, "The Composition of the Pentateuch," *SBL Seminar Papers 24, 1985* [ed. Kent Harold Richards; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1985] 393–415). John H. Sailhamer further develops this insight in "The Mosaic Law and the Theology of the Pentateuch," *WTJ* 53 (1991) 241–61.

<sup>8</sup> Marvin A. Sweeney, "Tanak versus Old Testament: Concerning the Foundation for a Jewish Theology of the Bible," in *Problems in Biblical Theology: Essays in Honor of Rolf Knierim* (ed. Henry T.C. Sun et al.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997) 365.

<sup>9</sup> "Semitisms and Septuagintalism in the Book of Revelation," *NTS* 37 (1991) 592–603, esp. p. 602.

<sup>10</sup> Stephen G. Dempster views the parallel between the NT and the *Tanak* a little differently; see *Dominion and Dynasty: A Biblical Theology of the Hebrew Bible* (NSBT 15; Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2003) 232–34. Christopher R. Seitz has recently suggested that the tripartite Hebrew Bible has influenced the shape of the NT canon, see *The Goodly Fellowship of the Prophets: The Achievement of Association in Canon Formation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009) 103. He posits that

books of the NT, the four Gospels and Acts as the “Fifth Gospel” (see below) parallel the Pentateuch as a five-book canonical structure.<sup>11</sup> The (mostly) apostolic letters bear a relation to the Prophets (cf. Jeremiah’s letter to the exiles in Jeremiah 29), for as in the recorded oracles of the prophets, in the letters the faults of God’s people are rebuked and corrected. If Acts is connected to the Letters (for their relation, see below), then it could be suggested that Acts-Letters parallel the Former and Latter Prophets. Revelation with its special dependence upon Daniel could be seen as parallel to the Writings (which includes Daniel). As argued in a previous article in this series, the Hebrew or Greek orderings of the OT books are not to be construed as Jewish versus Christian. The most that can be said is that the Jews became the custodians of the Hebrew order of the OT books and the church became the custodian of the Greek order. My point is that a case can be made that *either* order fits with arrangement of the NT.

## II. THE FOURFOLD GOSPEL

The premier position of the Gospels in the NT underscores the foundational importance of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ for all the writings of the NT (cf. 1 Cor 2:2; 3:11). Robert W. Wall makes this point in the following terms: “[They are] the subtext for all the writings that follow in the New Testament.”<sup>12</sup> The centrality of the narrative elements in Paul’s writings, as argued for example by Richard B. Hays,<sup>13</sup> can be seen as a step toward the ultimate production of written gospel narratives, suggesting the fundamental congruity of narrative structure between Paul’s gospel and the canonical Gospels. In terms of the time of composition, Paul’s epistles preceded the Gospels, but the apostolic correspondence assumes a well-known narrative of Jesus’ life and work such as later found written form in the Gospels. The epistles are addressed to believers who know through oral proclamation the story of Jesus (e.g. the brief and allusive reference to the passion of Jesus in 1 Pet 2:21–23).

As to the order of the four Gospels, John is treated in effect as the climax of the four, being at the same time different from the preceding three (the

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the relation of Deuteronomy to the preceding books is analogous to John’s relationship to the Synoptics. He likens the interconnected character of Book of the Twelve to the Pauline corpus, and he views Hebrews, the Catholic Epistles, and Revelation as standing in parallel to the Writings.

<sup>11</sup> I am not suggesting that Matthew parallels Genesis and Mark parallels Exodus, and so forth. It is the general parallel of two five-book structures that is in mind.

<sup>12</sup> “The Significance of a Canonical Perspective of the Church’s Scripture,” in *The Canon Debate* (ed. L. M. McDonald and J. A. Sanders; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2002) 536. For a recent attempt to demonstrate how the Gospels could play a determinative role for the rest of the NT, see Eugene E. Lemcio, “The Gospels Within the New Testament Canon,” in *Canon and Biblical Interpretation* (Scripture and Hermeneutics Series 7; ed. Craig Bartholomew *et al.*; Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2006) 123–45.

<sup>13</sup> *The Faith of Jesus Christ: The Narrative Substructure of Galatians 3:1–4:11* (2d ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002) 219–20.

Synoptics). There is no set order in patristic lists or discussions,<sup>14</sup> but the order that is now standard in printed Bibles predominated in Greek manuscripts and a rationale can be found for it. Irenaeus treated the common order of Matthew-Mark-Luke-John as the chronological order of composition,<sup>15</sup> but this may be no more than a supposition on his part. His repeated treatment of the Gospels also made use of other orders (notably Matthew-Luke-Mark-John).<sup>16</sup> There is the danger of overestimating the church's conscious intention in the ordering of the Four Gospel canon,<sup>17</sup> though, as stated by D. Moody Smith, the final order "projects a kind of intention that can scarcely be ignored."<sup>18</sup> The commission at the end of Matthew (28:20) is in part fulfilled by the subsequent Gospels (and letters), through which the nations will be taught "to observe all that [Jesus has] commanded." The positioning of Mark after Matthew gives Mark the appearance of being a digest of Matthew,<sup>19</sup> and until majority scholarship decided upon the (chronological) priority of Mark, that Gospel lived in the shadow of the larger Gospel that preceded it.<sup>20</sup> The preface to Luke (1:1-4) is a possible explanation for that Gospel's canonical placement after Matthew and Mark, for its non-pejorative reference to previous "attempts" (ἐπεχείρησαν) at writing an account of what Jesus said and did can be understood in canonical context as referring to the Gospels of Matthew and Mark.<sup>21</sup> John is placed fourth in the line-up, and its self-reference to "this book" (20:30) can be taken as an implicit acknowledgment of *other* books, namely the three preceding Gospels. John 21:25 makes an appropriate ending not only to this one Gospel with its selective focus on a few, larger cameos ("I suppose the world itself could not contain the books that would be written") but to the Four Gospel collection as a

<sup>14</sup> See John Barton, *Holy Writings, Sacred Text: The Canon in Early Christianity* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997) 149; Bruce M. Metzger, *The Canon of the New Testament: Its Origin, Development, and Significance* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1987) 296-97, and the inventory of twelve different sequences provided in Pierre-Maurice Bogaert, "Ordres anciens des évangiles et tétra-évangile en un seul codex," *Revue théologique de Louvain* 30 (1999) 297-314.

<sup>15</sup> *Adv. Haer.* 3.1.1.

<sup>16</sup> See *Adv. Haer.* 3.9-11; 3.11.7; 4.6.1.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Brevard Childs, *The New Testament as Canon: An Introduction* (London: SCM, 1984) 143-56.

<sup>18</sup> "John, the Synoptics, and the Canonical Approach to Exegesis," in *Tradition and Interpretation in the New Testament: Essays in Honor of E. Earle Ellis* (ed. Gerald F. Hawthorne with Otto Betz; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987) 171.

<sup>19</sup> Augustine notes the same thing (*De Consensu Evangelistarum*, 1.2.4; 4.10.11), but his comments are not to be understood as asserting a chronological order of composition or even literary dependence, see H. J. de Jonge, "Augustine on the Interrelations of the Gospels," in *Four Gospels, 1992: Festschrift Frans Neirynck* (ed. F. Van Segbroeck *et al.*; BETL 100; Leuven: Leuven University Press/Peeters, 1992) 2409-17.

<sup>20</sup> For a discussion of the pre-eminence of Matthew, see R. T. France, *Matthew: Evangelist and Teacher* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1989) 15-20.

<sup>21</sup> We could even perhaps go as far as to suggest that Luke's reference to "eyewitnesses and ministers of the word" (Luke 1:2) has in mind Matthew and Mark respectively (the suggestion is Trobisch's). The association of the first Gospel with Matthew, one of the Twelve, assumes that the writer was an eyewitness to many of the events narrated therein, and the designation "minister/servant" (ὑπηρέτης) is applied to (John) Mark in Acts 13:5 in his assistant role in an early mission trip.

whole.<sup>22</sup> This is not to claim that any other order of the four Gospels is impossible but to show the effect of the present order on reading.<sup>23</sup> My discussion is not to be understood as naively putting forward a solution to the Synoptic problem, rather it is a mild form of reader criticism on the usual order of the four Gospels.

In a sequential reading of the four Gospels in their common order, Matthew provides an account of the infancy of Jesus (Matthew 1–2). The first evangelist gives special prominence to the teaching of Jesus, especially in what are often identified as five great discourses, namely Matthew 5–7, 10, 13, 18, 24–25, and at the very end of this Gospel the risen Jesus commands his followers to disciple all the nations by “teaching them all that I have commanded you” (28.20a). Mark has the appearance of abbreviating Matthew, with a strong concentration on the cross of Jesus.<sup>24</sup> The rejection and suffering of Jesus are anticipated as early as Mark 2:20 (cf. 3:6). The second evangelist does not need to provide any information about the early years of Jesus and begins at the equivalent of Matthew 3 with the preparatory ministry of John. It is largely the teaching of Jesus that is not repeated in this fast-moving Gospel (N.B. “immediately” [εὐθὺς] 1:10, 12, 18 etc.). This brings the miracles of Jesus into greater (relative) prominence and the “longer ending” of Mark (16:9–20) accentuates this aspect by referring to Jesus’ continued working through the ministry of the disciples in the form of miraculous “signs” (see 16:17–18, 20). Read in common sequence, the Gospel of Luke looks like a recombination and adjustment of the preceding two Gospels, with a more even balance of miracles and teaching. To say that is not to propound a theory of Gospel origins (namely that the third evangelist made use of Matthew and Mark in composing his story of Jesus) but to suggest that this is the impression created in the mind of the reader. The third evangelist gives his own version of the infancy narratives (Luke 1–2). The story of Jesus as told by Luke begins and ends (Luke 1:5–23; 25:53) in the temple in Jerusalem, and Jesus’ final long journey to Jerusalem dominates the center of the Gospel (Luke 9:51–21:38). The appearances of the risen Christ occur in and around Jerusalem (Luke 24).

In John’s Gospel, Jesus makes a series of trips to Jerusalem (chaps. 2, 5, 7, 12). There are instances in which John can be understood as presupposing that his readers are familiar with the Synoptic tradition (if not with one or several of the written Gospels).<sup>25</sup> This suits its fourth position in the lineup

<sup>22</sup> This conclusion was arrived at independently of Trobisch (*First Edition of the New Testament*, 78, 97–101), who widens this to include John 21 as a whole. Trobisch argues that cross-references between various NT books indicate that the reader is meant to surmise that the common order of the four Gospels is in chronological order of composition (pp. 79–80).

<sup>23</sup> There was, for example, the so-called “Western” order (codices Bezae and Washington, the Chester Beatty codex known as P<sup>45</sup>): Matthew, John, Luke, Mark, whose rationale may be to give pride of place to the two Gospels attributed to apostles.

<sup>24</sup> See J. D. Kingsbury, “The Gospel in Four Editions,” *Int* 33 (1979) 363–75, esp. pp. 364–67.

<sup>25</sup> E.g. such allusive comments as John 1:40; 3:24; 4:44; 6:67, 71; 11:2; 18:24, 28 (provided by Blomberg). See the discussion by Craig L. Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of John’s Gospel* (Leicester: Apollon, 2001) 46–59, and briefly in Andreas J. Köstenberger, *Encountering John* (EBS;

of Gospels. John 2–11 are organized around a select series of “signs” and teaching related (more or less directly) to them, and there is a closer coordination of miracle and teaching (“sign” and discourse) than in the preceding Gospels (e.g. in John 6 the feeding of the 5,000 leads on to the claim by Jesus to be “the bread of life”).<sup>26</sup> The Johannine “signs” have a Christological symbolism, bringing miracle and dominical teaching closer together.<sup>27</sup> The focus upon fewer miracles compared to the preceding Gospels makes it look as if the fourth evangelist is giving a highly selective sampling of the revelatory actions of Jesus. John’s longer discourses give a profound recasting of dominical teaching such as is appropriate for those who have read and digested the preceding three Gospels.<sup>28</sup> Before this is attributed to imaginative creativity on the part of the author of the Fourth Gospel, it would be well to note the suggestion of J. A. T. Robinson: “the process may be one of deepening truth rather than falsification or fiction.”<sup>29</sup> Robinson makes the claim that the Johannine presentation of the teaching material of Jesus “could be *both* the most mature *and* the most faithful to the original truth about Jesus.”<sup>30</sup> The idiolect of the Johannine portrait of Jesus is not without connection with the way Jesus speaks in the Synoptics, with the so-called “Johannine thunderbolt” in Matt 11:27 (and the parallel in Luke 10:22) being the famous example (cf. John 3:35; 10:15).<sup>31</sup> The Christian reader is in a position to appreciate what is said by Jesus after being brought up to speed through reading the first three Gospels.

The effect of placing the Gospels *side by side*, with the three Synoptic Gospels next to each other, is that each must now be read in the light of the

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Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999) 36–37. John A. T. Robinson, however, argues for the priority of the Gospel of John, by which he means that we must approach this Gospel on its own terms rather than trying to slot it into the Synoptic picture of Jesus (*The Priority of John* [ed. J. F. Coakley; London: SCM, 1985]).

<sup>26</sup> See the schema of Leon Morris, wherein he strives to connect the seven Johannine signs (according to Morris’ tabulation) with seven discourses (*Jesus is the Christ: Studies in the Theology of John* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989] 23).

<sup>27</sup> See Dorothy A. Lee, *The Symbolic Narratives of the Fourth Gospel: The Interplay of Form and Meaning* (JSNTSup 95; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994); Craig R. Koester, *Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel: Meaning, Mystery, Community* (2d ed.; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003) chap. 3: “Symbolic Actions.”

<sup>28</sup> Köstenberger, *Encountering John* 198–200; D. Moody Smith, Jr., “Johannine Christianity: Some Reflections on its Character and Delineation,” *NTS* 21 (1975) 222–48, esp. pp. 228–33.

<sup>29</sup> *Priority of John* 299. See the whole of Robinson’s discussion of the Johannine presentation of the teachings of Jesus (pp. 296–342).

<sup>30</sup> *Priority of John* 342 (italics Robinson’s). For the issue of Johannine diction, see Craig L. Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of the Gospels* (2d ed.; Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2007) 231–36.

<sup>31</sup> See the discussion provided in J. Jeremias, *New Testament Theology, Part One: The Proclamation of Jesus* (trans. J. Bowden; London: SCM, 1971) 56–61; and Adelbert Denaux, “The Q-Logion Mt 11,27 / Lk 10,22 and the Gospel of John,” in *John and the Synoptics* (ed. Adelbert Denaux; Leuven: Leuven University Press/Peeters, 1992) 163–99. More generally, see P. W. Ensor, “Johannine Sayings of Jesus and the Question of Authenticity,” in *Challenging Perspectives on the Gospel of John* (ed. J. Lierman; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006) 14–33. Ensor argues that the gap between the Jesus of John and the Jesus of the Synoptics is not as wide as commonly supposed.

other three. We should allow for a measure of historical contingency in the process that gave us such canonical aggregations,<sup>32</sup> but that does not mean that the Four Gospel collection is without hermeneutical significance. One obvious alternative (that was not taken up) was to conjoin Luke and Acts “as one unit in a mutually interpretive two-part treatise,”<sup>33</sup> but as it is, their lack of proximity in the canonical arrangement is a statement about the *differing* contexts in which each volume should be read. The four Gospels have been placed side by side in the canon, inviting comparison, but not harmonization, given the retention of the fourfold form. Their variety is to be seen as a resource, and the unique message of each of the Gospels must be proclaimed rather a homogenized blend. The multiple accounts of the same person, Jesus Christ, and even the same events, such as the feeding of the 5,000 (Matt 14:13–21; Mark 6:30–44; Luke 9:10–17; John 6:1–14), invite comparison and contrast. Furthermore, the Gospels have a united theological orientation, with their focus on the words and deeds of the *earthly* Christ (as distinct from Paul, for example). Paul is, however, by no means uninterested in the tradition of the sayings of Jesus,<sup>34</sup> nor was he ignorant of the pre-passion ministry of Jesus.<sup>35</sup> We can easily overstress their circumstantial character and should recall that Matthew preserves ninety percent of Mark’s material. As well, the passion narrative represents a significant amount of common ground between the four Gospels. Thus the four belong together, and yet the early church neither gave preferential treatment to one nor harmonized the four into a single blended story.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>32</sup> See Robert W. Wall and Eugene E. Lemcio, *The New Testament as Canon: A Reader in Canonical Criticism* (JSNTSup 76; Sheffield: JSOT, 1992) chap. 1: “The Gospels and Canonical Criticism.” I acknowledge my substantial dependence on Wall and Lemcio in this paragraph.

<sup>33</sup> Michael F. Bird, “The Unity of Luke–Acts in Recent Discussion,” *JSNT* 29 (2007) 425–48 (p. 440). See Graham N. Stanton’s discussion of the early separation of Luke and Acts in “The Fourfold Gospel,” *NTS* 43 (1997) 334–35. Available data suggest that Luke and Acts lived separate lives; see Jens Schröter, “Die Apostelgeschichte und die Entstehung des neutestamentlichen Kanons; Beobachtungen zur kanonisierung der Apostelgeschichte und ihrer Bedeutung als kanonischer Schrift,” in *The Biblical Canons* (ed. J.-M. Auwers and H. J. De Jonge; Leuven: Leuven University Press/Peeters, 2003) 395–429; Andrew Gregory, *The Reception of Luke and Acts in the Period before Irenaeus: Looking for Luke in the Second Century* (WUNT 2/169; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003) 2–3, 352; C. Kavin Rowe, “History, Hermeneutics, and the Unity of Luke–Acts,” *JSNT* 28 (2005) 131–57. There are some Gospel orders in which Luke is placed fourth (Bogaert, “Ordres anciens” 299–301, 304–5), however, Luke is not placed next to Acts in any extant old manuscript (J. Dawsey, “The Literary Unity of Luke–Acts: Questions of Style—A Task for Literary Critics,” *NTS* 35 [1989] 50).

<sup>34</sup> See Nikolaus Walter, “Paulus und die urchristliche Jesustradition,” *NTS* 31 (1985) 498–522; Seyoon Kim, “Jesus, Sayings of,” in *Dictionary of Paul and his Letters* (ed. G. F. Hawthorne, R. P. Martin, and D. Reid; Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1993) 474–92; David Wenham, *Paul: Follower of Jesus or Founder of Christianity?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995).

<sup>35</sup> David Wenham, “The Story of Jesus Known to Paul,” in *Jesus of Nazareth: Lord and Christ: Essays on the Historical Jesus and New Testament Christology* (ed. Joel B. Green and Max Turner; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994) 297–311.

<sup>36</sup> Marcion (c. AD 140) had (and maybe only knew of) one Gospel, Luke, and Tatian (c. AD 170) produced a Gospel harmony, the *Diatessaron*, but neither option was followed by the wider church.

The diversity of the four is a precious asset for the church, for we need all four Gospels to communicate the “whole counsel of God” today. Redaction criticism has expended much effort to reconstruct the situations of the early Christian communities addressed by the individual Gospels, an enterprise which by nature is much more speculative than the present canonical context. Richard Bauckham argues that the individual Gospels were not written just for one community,<sup>37</sup> and their being collected together confirms this (or is at least consistent with it). The “context” of Mark, for example, is by the side of the other three Gospels. The fourfold Gospel collection requires us to read each of the Gospels as a *version* of the life of Jesus and not the exclusive account of it, and this becomes a critical principle of interpretation. An idiosyncratic construal of Jesus’ message and work based on a tendentious reading of one Gospel is ruled out of court by the canonical arrangement.<sup>38</sup>

### III. ACTS

The Pauline corpus as we now have it in the English Bible is prefaced by the placement of the book of the Acts, and in such a position Acts forms a bridge between the Gospels and the letters.<sup>39</sup> Acts, being the second volume of Luke’s two-part work, bears a resemblance to the Gospel genre,<sup>40</sup> and Acts 1:1 briefly resumes the prologue of Luke’s Gospel (Luke 1:1–4) that thereby applies to both parts. Yet instead of focusing on one main character (Jesus), Acts broadens its scope to present key episodes in the lives of several early church figures, especially Peter and Paul. Peter already is prominent in the four Gospels, with the Third Gospel being no exception (e.g. Luke 5:1–11; 8:45; 9:20, 32; 12:41). Frequently the disciples in Acts mimic some facet of Jesus’ life as described in Luke, for example, teaching in the temple courts (Acts 3, cf. Luke 19:47–48; 22:23–38) and performing healings (Acts 9:32–35, cf. Luke 5:17–26). Jesus’ journey to Jerusalem finds a parallel in Paul’s to Jerusalem and Rome.<sup>41</sup> All this gives Acts somewhat the character

<sup>37</sup> “For Whom Were Gospels Written,” in *The Gospels for All Christians: Rethinking the Gospel Audiences* (ed. Richard Bauckham; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998) 9–48.

<sup>38</sup> For the argument that the four Gospels balance each other, preventing a one-sided Christology, see Robert Morgan, “Which was the Fourth Gospel? The Order of the Gospels and the Unity of Scripture,” *JSNT* 54 (1994) 3–28, esp. p. 24; E. E. Lemcio, “Father and Son in the Synoptics and John: A Canonical Reading,” in Lemcio and Wall, *New Testament as Canon* 78–108.

<sup>39</sup> Childs, *New Testament as Canon* 219–25; cf. Robert W. Wall, “The Acts of the Apostles in Canonical Context,” *BTB* 18 (1988) 16–24; idem, “The Acts of the Apostles,” in *The New Interpreter’s Bible: A Commentary in Twelve Volumes* (ed. Leander E. Keck; Nashville: Abingdon, 2002) X.26–32, 389–91. Wall takes the work of Childs further. I acknowledge my substantial dependence on Wall for this paragraph. See David E. Smith, *The Canonical Function of Acts: A Comparative Analysis* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2002) 39–40 for criticisms of Childs and Wall. Smith favors the wider thesis that Acts is the “glue” that holds all the pieces of the NT together.

<sup>40</sup> Burridge, *What Are the Gospels?* 236–39, 275–79; idem, *Imitating Jesus: An Inclusive Approach to New Testament Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007) 228–29.

<sup>41</sup> See Susan Marie Praeder, “Jesus-Paul, Peter-Paul, and Jesus-Peter Parallelisms in Luke-Acts: A History of Reader Response,” *SBL 1982 Seminar Papers* (ed. Kent Harold Richards; Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1984) 23–39.

of a "Fifth Gospel." As well, the mission ending of each of the four Gospels (Matt 28:16–20; Mark 16:9–20;<sup>42</sup> Luke 24:44–49; John 21) helps to prepare for the spread of the gospel, which is what is plotted in Acts.

In the other direction, churches planted by Paul in Acts receive letters from the same apostle: Thessalonica, Corinth, Philippi, etc. Acts provides the background to help situate individual Pauline letters in their time and location.<sup>43</sup> Canonically, the Paul of Acts is the same Paul who wrote the letters.<sup>44</sup> Though Acts makes no allusion to Paul writing letters, some scholars have recently argued that the Pauline letters were used by the author of Acts.<sup>45</sup> Furthermore, there are obvious parallels between the activities of Peter and Paul as recorded in Acts (e.g. the healing of a lame man, 3:1–10 and 14:8–10). The harmony in Acts between Paul's Gentile mission and the Jewish mission of James, Cephas, and John prefaces the apostolic witness of the letters that follow (cf. Gal 2:9 where the "pillars" are listed in the same order as the General Letters). At the heart of Acts is the council at Jerusalem (Acts 15:1–21) where potential discord between the Pauline mission and the Jerusalem apostles is resolved.<sup>46</sup> In that passage Peter and James are portrayed as supporting Paul. In its present canonical setting, Acts is a consensus document that provides the context for interpreting the Pauline and non-Pauline corpora, not as competing traditions within the early church, but as compatible and complementary.<sup>47</sup> Acts asserts

<sup>42</sup> Taking a maximalist view of the text of Mark, see William R. Farmer, *The Last Twelve Verses of Mark* (SNTSMS 25; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974). Farmer argues that neither the external nor the internal evidence is decisive against the originality of the longer ending. The GNT<sup>4</sup> editors, however, rate its omission as an "A," which means that all five editors agree that the passage is not original. James A. Kelhoffer argues that the verses are from the early decades of the second century and presuppose a Four Gospel collection, see *Miracle and Mission: The Authentication of Missionaries and Their Message in the Longer Ending of Mark* (WUNT 2/112; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000) 154–56.

<sup>43</sup> Colossians is, however, an exception, for the church in Colossae was not founded by Paul (see Col 2:1).

<sup>44</sup> F. F. Bruce, "Is the Paul of Acts the Real Paul?," *BJRL* 58 (1976) 282–305; for a more recent review and defense, see Stanley E. Porter, *The Paul of Acts: Essays in Literary Criticism, Rhetoric, and Theology* (WUNT 115; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1999) 187–206.

<sup>45</sup> See Steve Walton, *Leadership and Lifestyle: The Portrait of Paul in the Miletus Speech and 1 Thessalonians* (SNTSMS 108; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000) 199–214; William O. Walker, Jr., "Acts and the Pauline Corpus Revisited: Peter's Speech at the Jerusalem Conference," in *Literary Studies in Luke-Acts: Essays in Honor of Joseph B. Tyson* (ed. R. P. Thompson and T. E. Phillips; Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1998) 77–86, argues for the dependence of Acts 15:7–11 on Galatians 2.

<sup>46</sup> See the discussion of Trobisch (*First Edition of the New Testament* 82, 83).

<sup>47</sup> See Dieter Lüthmann, "Gal 2 9 und die katholischen Breife: Bemerkungen zum Kanon und zur regula fidei," *ZNW* 72 (1981) 65–87, esp. p. 72: "Gal 2 1–10 ist mit Act 15 1–35 in der Alten Kirche der locus classicus für die Einheit der apostolischen Lehre." Trobisch, likewise, sees the names of the alleged Gospel authors Mark and Luke as in effect cross-references to passages in Acts, 1 Peter, and the letters of Paul, indicating the essential harmony between the Jerusalem authorities and Paul (*First Edition of the New Testament* 45, 46). In my view, Paul's correction of Peter in Galatians 2 assumes (without stating it) that Peter accepted the rebuke and the two men were reconciled later. Peter's commendation of the teaching of Paul in 2 Pet 3:15–16, accepted as genuinely Petrine (see M. J. Kruger, "The Authenticity of 2 Peter," *JETS* 42 [1999] 645–71), adds weight to this assumption by the reader.

the normative status of the different perspectives enshrined in the Pauline and non-Pauline letter collections. The Catholic Epistles document the teaching of other primitive apostolic figures, especially the “pillar apostles” (Gal 2:9) and give a broader sampling of the apostolic witness than simply that furnished by the Pauline epistles. The coordinating function of Acts implies that the Pauline epistles are not just for the Gentiles, nor are the non-Pauline epistles only for Jewish believers.

In Vaticanus (B) and Alexandrinus (A) Acts stands between the four Gospels and the Catholic Epistles, with the Pauline Epistles after that, but in Sinaiticus (Ⲙ) the order is Gospels, Pauline Epistles, Acts, and Catholic Epistles. The positioning of the non-Pauline epistles after Acts (where they are in all Greek witnesses<sup>48</sup>) could be viewed as promoting non-Pauline forms of Christianity, which appears to reverse Luke’s implicit intention in Acts of defending Paul against his detractors (given the series of apologetic speeches by Paul in the latter portion of Acts). In the Vulgate (determining the order within the Western Bible, Protestant and Catholic), Acts is placed between the Gospels and the Pauline Epistles.<sup>49</sup> This has the potential effect of relegating the non-Pauline epistles to the category of an appendix and of confirming the theological dominance of Paul in modern NT scholarship, but as expressed by Richard Bauckham, “Nothing about the canon *requires* us first to learn what Christianity is from Paul and then to see what James and others have to add.”<sup>50</sup>

Contrary to the order customary in English Bibles, in the Greek codices Acts and the Catholic Epistles are a single collection. Greek manuscripts commonly situate Hebrews after Philemon (D L Ψ, other majuscules, most minuscules) or between 2 Thessalonians and the Pastorals, namely as the last of Paul’s letters to churches and before his letters to individuals (Ⲙ A B C H I K P etc.).<sup>51</sup> Either placement is a clear assertion that Hebrews belongs

<sup>48</sup> See the listing provided in *GNT*<sup>4</sup>, pp. 6\*–18\*.

<sup>49</sup> See Samuel Berger, *Histoire de la Vulgate: pendant les premiers siècles du moyen âge* (Hildesheim/New York: Georg Olms, 1976) 339. In the Muratorian Fragment, “the acts of all the apostles” is discussed after Luke and John and before the Pauline Epistles. So, too, in Eusebius (*Hist. eccl.* 3.25.1–2), the order of discussion of the *homologoumena* (accepted or recognized writings) is: the Gospels, Acts, Pauline Epistles (and Revelation).

<sup>50</sup> Richard Bauckham, *James: Wisdom of James, Disciple of Jesus the Sage* (New Testament Readings; ed. John Court; London: Routledge, 1999) 116 (italics Bauckham’s).

<sup>51</sup> For more details, see Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (2d ed.; Stuttgart: Bibelgesellschaft, 1994) 591–92. Ɀ<sup>46</sup> (c. AD 200–250) is the oldest manuscript of Paul’s letters, but breaks off after 1 Thess 5:28. In it Hebrews is placed between Romans and 1–2 Corinthians on account of its size (being shorter than 1 Corinthians but longer than 2 Corinthians). David Trobisch suggests that the stichometric principle was compromised due to a desire to keep the Corinthian correspondence together (*Paul’s Letter Collection: Tracing the Origins* [Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1994] 17). Jeremy Duff (“Ɀ<sup>46</sup> and the Pastorals: A Misleading Consensus?,” *NTS* 44 [1998] 578–90) argues that the final portion of Ɀ<sup>46</sup> may have contained the Pastorals as extra leaves or an extra quire, or possibly that the scribe intended to include them, though space precluded this. In Vaticanus (B 03) the chapters of the Pauline Epistles are continuously numbered as if one book (1–93). In that codex, though Hebrews is physically placed after 2 Thessalonians, the six section numbers assigned to Hebrews (which is defective after 9.14a) (59–64) suggest that in the ancestor of Vaticanus Hebrews followed Galatians.

within the *Corpus Paulinum*.<sup>52</sup> The latter sequence is found in the famous list in Festal Letter 39 of Athanasius (AD 367).<sup>53</sup> The Vulgate (and hence English Bibles) conforms to the majority of late Byzantine manuscripts and places Hebrews at the end of Paul's letters.<sup>54</sup>

The order of Acts–Catholic Epistles–Pauline Epistles reflects the presentation within Acts itself, in which Peter largely dominates chapters 1–12 and chapters 13–28 center on Paul. The Orthodox churches arrange the books of the NT in this order. Again, it is not a question of right and wrong (positionings), for the alternative placement of books throws a different light on their contents, so that exegetical alternatives are placed before the reader. The logic of the placement of Paul's letters immediately after Acts is that Paul's story dominates the second half of that book. The (alternative) logic of having non-Pauline letters follow Acts is that this order draws attention to the fact that Acts features apostles other than Paul (especially Peter, who is the leading figure in the first half of the book). The existence of two different canonical orders warns the reader against prescribing one or other order as determinative for interpretation. To give exclusive rights to any one order of books would be to fail to see the character of paratext as (uninspired) commentary on the text.

#### IV. THE LETTERS

As for the Pauline corpus, the manuscript evidence before printing indicates fluidity in the order of the letters.<sup>55</sup> In the present sequence, the letters are roughly ranked according their (decreasing) length<sup>56</sup> and audience (letters to the same church/individual are placed together).<sup>57</sup> Though the position of Romans at the head of the Pauline corpus is due to the mechanical principle of length, it is also the most treatise-like of Paul's letters, and so appropriately

<sup>52</sup> Frederic G. Kenyon, *The Chester Beatty Biblical Papyri Descriptions and Texts of Twelve Manuscripts on Papyrus of the Greek Bible: Fasciculus III Supplement Pauline Epistles* (London: Emery Walker, 1936) xi, xii. See the recent survey of complete NT codices by Daryl D. Schmidt ("The Greek New Testament as a Codex," in *The Canon Debate* [ed. L. M. McDonald and J. A. Sanders; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2002] 469–84).

<sup>53</sup> See the Greek text and translation supplied by A. Souter, *The Text and Canon of the New Testament* (London: Duckworth, 1912) 214–15. In the Sahidic version of the festal letter, Hebrews is found between 2 Corinthians and Galatians (T. Skeat, "The Codex Sinaiticus, The Codex Vaticanus and Constantine," *JTS* NS 50 [1999] 600).

<sup>54</sup> See W. H. P. Hatch, "The Position of Hebrews in the Canon of the New Testament," *HTR* 29 (1936) 133–52, esp. pp. 149–50. According to Hatch, Hebrews only found a settled place after the Pauline corpus in printed editions of the NT. See also J. K. Elliot, "Manuscripts, the Codex and the Canon," *JSNT* 63 (1996) 108–9, and Samuel Berger (*Histoire de la Vulgate* 339–42), who provides extensive lists of alternate Latin orders.

<sup>55</sup> Jack Finegan, "The Original Form of the Pauline Collection," *HTR* 49 (1956) 85–103, esp. pp. 88–90; David Trobisch, *Die Entstehung der Paulusbriefsammlung: Studien zu den Anfängen christlicher Publizistik* (NTOA 10; Freiburg: Universitätsverlag, 1989) 14–61.

<sup>56</sup> Except that Galatians is slightly shorter than Ephesians. The order Ephesians–Galatians in  $\mathfrak{P}^{46}$  is perhaps due to the differing systems of stichometry in use in antiquity.

<sup>57</sup> Lemcio and Wall, *New Testament as Canon* 144.

functions as a theological introduction to the Pauline corpus.<sup>58</sup> As Acts ends with Paul in Rome, it is fitting that Romans should immediately follow it in modern printed Bibles (with Rom 1:8–15 and 15:22–29 discussing a possible visit to Rome!). As well, Romans naturally follows after Acts 28, for Romans explains the Jewish hardening predicted in the Isaiah 6 quotation of Acts 28:26–27 (cf. Romans 9–11). Romans also gives content to Paul's preaching of "the kingdom of God" (28:31, cf. Rom 1:3) and is in effect an answer to the false charge made against Paul in Acts 21:28, with Romans being an authentic summary of his teaching.<sup>59</sup> His letter is written to enlist the help of the church in Rome, so that these believers might speed him on his way to Spain (Rom 15:22–29). The teaching of this letter, which is the most theologically comprehensive of the Pauline letters, is designed to lay a platform for Roman support of his mission, and so it comes in the form of a "theological resume."<sup>60</sup> This letter, in contrast to the ones that follow, is less influenced by the contingent, local problems of the church to which it was sent.<sup>61</sup> The abiding importance of the Pauline letters is that with the removal of Paul, his letters continue to visit the churches,<sup>62</sup> and their presence side-by-side in a corpus and with a theological framework provided by Romans in effect makes them *all* circular letters.

Readers are invited to read and compare the individual letters, so that the context of Philippians, for example, is not the original situation at Philippi (if that could be known in any detail),<sup>63</sup> but the fact that it now comes within a collection of thirteen letters by Paul. Though the discussion in Paul's letters was originally evoked by contemporary and contingent factors in the life of particular churches (e.g. 1 Cor 7:1: "Now concerning the matters about which you wrote."), they are no longer (canonically) "occasional letters." The canonical positioning of the letters as a collection is the most important

<sup>58</sup> In his final book, Brevard Childs explored the significance of the premier position of Romans, see *The Church's Guide for Reading Paul: The Canonical Shaping of the Pauline Corpus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008). He suggested that the rest of the corpus was to be read through the lens of the mature and comprehensive survey of Pauline teaching found in Romans (e.g. pp. 7, 66–67, 104, and 117). Childs's view in part builds on Günther Bornkamm's famous discussion, "The Letter to the Romans as Paul's Last Will and Testament." According to Childs, "the placing of Romans as an introduction was not a tour de force, but was encouraged by the very nature of the letter itself" (p. 175). The other part of his thesis is that Romans and the Pastorals act as book-ends, with the Pastorals showing how the earlier letters are to be read as Scripture (pp. 164–67).

<sup>59</sup> This suggests that there is a measure of truth in the thesis of Jacob Jervell, which, however, fails to fully convince as a total explanation of the purpose of Romans ("The Letter to Jerusalem," in *The Romans Debate* [ed. K. P. Donfried; Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1977] 61–74).

<sup>60</sup> See Sam K. Williams, "The 'Righteousness of God' in Romans," *JBL* 99 (1980) 245–55.

<sup>61</sup> This is an important aspect of Childs's argument; see *The Church's Guide for Reading Paul*, 139, 145, 147, 179.

<sup>62</sup> See Robert W. Funk, "The Apostolic *Parousia*: Form and Significance," in *Christian History and Interpretation: Studies Presented to John Knox* (ed. W. R. Farmer, C. F. D. Moule, and R. R. Niebuhr; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967) 249–68.

<sup>63</sup> On the pitfalls of mirror reading, see Thomas R. Schreiner, *Interpreting the Pauline Epistles* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1990) 43–50. In the case of Philippi, Acts provides little information that is relevant to the interpretation of the letter.

index of their meaning, and the canon provides a fixed context and so stability of meaning, as opposed to intertextuality, which is the free association of *all* other texts without deference to any canonical concept, and in contrast to an overdependence upon the postulated historical background (the reconstruction of which is often largely based upon an attempt to read between the lines of the letter itself).

The Pauline order is set out in two major categories: letters to churches, then letters to individuals (and the churches behind them).<sup>64</sup> Because of this, Colossians is separated from Philemon (compare the names at the end of each of these letters).<sup>65</sup> The order of Paul's letters to churches, Romans–Thessalonians, appears to be according to a stichometric principle (from longest to shortest). Similarly, in the next series of four letters addressed to individuals, 1 Timothy appears first as the longest letter, and Philemon, the shortest, is placed at the end. Features such as the general ecclesial instructions given in 1 Timothy and Titus (e.g. 1 Tim 3:14–15; 4:11; Titus 2:1) for Timothy and Titus as apostolic delegates to pass on to others, the character of 2 Timothy as a “testament” of Paul, and the fact that others besides Philemon are addressed (Phlm 1, 2), make the wider application of the four letters obvious, so that the division between letters to churches and individuals is at least to some extent schematic.<sup>66</sup> Comparison may be made to the seven letters of Ignatius (To the Ephesians, To the Magnesians, To the Trallians, To the Romans, To the Philadelphians, To the Smyrnaeans, To Polycarp). The pattern is the same as the common ordering of the Pauline corpus, namely letters to churches (six) followed by a letter to an individual (Polycarp, bishop of Smyrna).

<sup>64</sup> See Jerome D. Quinn, “ $\Psi$ <sup>46</sup>—The Pauline Canon?,” *CBQ* 36 (1974) 379–85, with this codex containing Pauline documents that were read as letters to the churches, as the title each of the letters bears indicates: “To Hebrews,” “To Corinthians,” etc. This is the oldest known copy of the Pauline Epistles, and it places Hebrews after Romans, possibly due to considerations of length (seeing Hebrews is longer than 2 Corinthians). The Muratorian Fragment differentiates between Paul's letters to seven churches and the letters he wrote “out of affection and love one to Philemon, one to Titus and two to Timothy” (lines 59–60; the translation provided in Metzger, *Canon of the New Testament* 305–7).

<sup>65</sup> See H. J. Frede, “Die Ordnung der Paulusbrieve und der Platz des Kolosserbriefs im Corpus Paulinum,” in *Epistula ad Colossenses* (ed. idem; *Vetus Latina: Die Reste der altlateinischen Bibel* 24/2 fascicule 4; Freiburg: Herder, 1969) 290–303. Frede cites the 6th century uncial Claromontanus that places Colossians among “die Privatbriefe,” between the Pastoral Epistles and Philemon (pp. 292, 294).

<sup>66</sup> The suggestion is that of N. A. Dahl, “The Particularity of the Pauline Epistles as a Problem in the Ancient Church,” in *Neotestamentica et Patristica: Eine Freundesgabe, Herrn Professor Dr. Oscar Cullmann zu seinem 60. Geburtstag Überreicht* (VTS 6; Leiden: Brill, 1962) 266; but see Jeffrey T. Reed, “To Timothy or Not? A Discourse Analysis of 1 Timothy,” in *Biblical Greek Language and Linguistics: Open Questions in Current Research* (ed. S. E. Porter and D. A. Carson; *JSNTSup* 80; Sheffield: JSOT, 1993) 90–118. Reed does not comment on the formality of Paul's self-designation (1.1: “an apostle of Christ Jesus”; p. 97). The use of vocative address (“O Timothy”; 6.20a) is soon followed by “Grace be with you” (6.21b) using the second person plural pronoun (now upgraded to an A rating in *GNT*<sup>4</sup>). According to Reed, there is nothing that requires the letter to be read by anyone but Timothy, though 6:21 may encourage that as a secondary use (p. 101).

Paul wrote letters to seven churches (Romans, Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Thessalonians) just as there are letters to seven churches in Revelation 2–3. The Muratorian Fragment explicitly relates Paul's seven letters to the seven letters in Revelation saying: "the blessed apostle Paul himself, following the example of his predecessor John, writes by name to only seven churches . . . it is clearly recognized that there is one church spread throughout the whole extent of the earth, for John also in the Apocalypse, though he writes to seven churches, nevertheless speaks to all."<sup>67</sup> This was a patristic argument that Paul's letters were intended from the beginning for the *ecclesia catholica*,<sup>68</sup> an argument that needed to ignore, however, the inclusion of Hebrews in the Pauline corpus. If Hebrews were to be included, the point can perhaps be salvaged by noting that there are 14 (7×2) Pauline letters in total.<sup>69</sup> So, too, what can be gleaned about Marcion's Pauline collection, indicates that it consisted of ten letters, with letters to the same destination (7 destinations in total) clumped together in the following order: Galatians, 1–2 Corinthians, Romans, 1–2 Thessalonians, Laodiceans (= Ephesians), Colossians-Philemon, and Philippians.<sup>70</sup> The bringing together of Paul's letters to form a *corpus Paulinum* encourages a hermeneutic in which Paul's instructions and advice on local issues (whether to a church or individual) are deparicularized so as to be applicable in all times and places.

With regard to its canonical positioning after Philemon in modern printed Bibles, Hebrews looks both backwards and forwards. The juxtaposition of the Pauline letters with non-Pauline letters, and with Paul's letters in what is now the common ordering *preceding* the non-Pauline letters, gives primacy of Paul's teaching and implies that the letters of James, Peter, and John play a subordinate role.<sup>71</sup> Sandwiched as it now is between the two collections, Hebrews helps to coordinate the Pauline and non-Pauline corpora,<sup>72</sup> not least by the fact that it broadens the theology attributed to the Pauline circle (see below).<sup>73</sup> There is a certain appropriateness in placing Hebrews

<sup>67</sup> Muratorian fragment, lines 48–50, 57–59 (translation provided by Metzger, *Canon of the New Testament* 307); see Dahl, "Particularity of the Pauline Epistles," 261–64.

<sup>68</sup> Krister Stendahl, "The Apocalypse of John and the Epistles of Paul in the Muratorian Fragment," in *Current Issues in New Testament Interpretation: Essays in Honor of Otto A. Piper* (ed. William Klassen and Graydon F. Snyder; London: SCM, 1962) 239–45.

<sup>69</sup> A point made by Elliot, "Manuscripts, the Codex and the Canon" 109. Festal Letter 39 of Athanasius notes that the letters of Paul (placing Hebrews after the two letters to the Thessalonians) number fourteen. Eusebius's tally of fourteen Pauline Epistles must include Hebrews (*Hist. eccl.* 3.3.4–5).

<sup>70</sup> D. C. Parker, *An Introduction to the New Testament Manuscripts and Their Texts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008) 251.

<sup>71</sup> This has at times distorted exegesis, as when James's discussion of faith and works (Jas 2:14–26) is viewed in a Pauline frame and so seen as anti-Pauline, or as using terms borrowed from Paul, or just given more prominence than is due within the overall teaching of the letter.

<sup>72</sup> Robert W. Wall, "The Problem of the Multiple Letter Canon of the New Testament," *HBT* 8 (1986) 17–19.

<sup>73</sup> See the discussion of Childs as to how the inclusion of Hebrews affected the subsequent reading of the Pauline corpus (*Church's Guide for Reading Paul* 250–52).

immediately before the Catholic Epistles, for Hebrews is more sermon than letter, as are James, 1 John, and 1 Peter. In some early English Bible orders (e.g. Tyndale [1526], Coverdale [1550] and Matthews [1549]<sup>74</sup>) Hebrews is even positioned *among* the General Epistles (after the epistles of Peter and John, and before the epistles of James and Jude), despite the fact that it is still given the title “The Letter of St Paul unto the Hebrews.” This order places the letters attributed to apostles together (1, 2 Peter, 1, 2, 3 John) and letters attributed to the half-brothers of Jesus together (James, Jude).

On the other hand, Hebrews has connections to Paul. The closing verses of Hebrews (13:22–24) do not claim a direct link with Paul by attributing authorship to him, rather they make an indirect connection by their reference to “our brother Timothy,” whom the anonymous author acknowledges as coworker and companion. This puts the author within the Pauline circle. The letter’s stress upon faith (e.g. the roll call of Hebrews 11) fits such a setting, though its definition of faith as enduring hope (Heb 10:39; 11:1–2) is a different concept of faith than that which is usual for Paul (yet see Acts 14:22).<sup>75</sup> Its affirmation of the heavenly session of Christ (Heb 1:3) is in accord with the high Christology of Ephesians (Eph 2:6) and Colossians (Col 3:1). Its extensive interaction with OT texts suggests a relation to Romans with its many citations of the OT (especially Romans 9–11).<sup>76</sup> If the author is not Paul, this marks the teaching as contemporary with Paul (or nearly so) and compatible and complementary to the Pauline corpus. Hebrews, because of its affinities with both collections, brings Pauline and non-Pauline collections into a mutually enriching canonical conversation.

The common order of the General Letters shows letters attributed to James and Jude, the two half-brothers of Jesus, surrounding (*inclusio*) the apostolic letters of Peter and John. The placing of the letters of Peter and John side by side shows the easy compatibility of their witness to Christ. This becomes a final canonical comment upon the implicit competition between Peter and “the beloved disciple” (= John) that is plotted in the final chapters of John’s Gospel (John 13:21–30; 18:15–18; 20:1–10; 21:15–24). 2 Peter follows 1 Peter due to their relative lengths, but 2 Pet 3:1 (“This is now the second letter that I have written to you”) may refer to 1 Peter, or was understood as doing so, though there is no certainty about its historical referent. So too, Jude’s self-reference as the “brother of James” (Jude 1) is an intra-canonical link with the Letter of James. The similarities between 2 Peter and Jude, whatever their genetic explanation,<sup>77</sup> help to unify the

<sup>74</sup> The dates refer to the edition I examined, which is not necessarily the first edition. My thanks go to Canon Maurice Betteridge for his help in accessing this material.

<sup>75</sup> This, of course, presents Paul through a Lucan lens. See Leonhard Goppelt, *Theology of the New Testament Volume 2: The Variety and Unity of the Apostolic Witness to Christ* (trans. John E. Alsup; ed. Jürgen Roloff; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982) 265–66.

<sup>76</sup> Childs, *Church’s Guide to Reading Paul* 251–52, 258.

<sup>77</sup> See Terrance Callan, “Use of the Letter of Jude by the Second Letter of Peter,” *Bib* 85 (2004) 42–64, who argues that 2 Pet 2:1–3:3 has thoroughly reworked and freely paraphrased material from Jude 4–18.

Catholic Epistles. We might have expected Jude to follow straight after 2 Peter, but it was not allowed to intrude on the James-Peter-John sequence (the order in Gal 2:9). Jude, however, is well situated after the discussion about false teachers in 1–3 John. As well, Jude draws on apocalypses (e.g. vv. 9, 14) and its theme of the challenges to faith “in the last time” (e.g. v. 21) anticipate and help to pave the way for the book of Revelation that follows it in the common ordering of the books. The limitation of the General Epistles to seven is another way in which their universal scope and intention is indicated.<sup>78</sup> Epistles by the same author are kept together and (as in the case of the Pauline letters) are ordered according to decreasing length,<sup>79</sup> and so canonical order is no indicator of chronological order of composition.

Revelation, with its letters and vision addressed to actual churches (the letters to the “seven churches” in chapters 2–3), is probably to be seen as a circular letter to seven Asian churches, appropriating the letter form to transmit its vision. As well, Rev 1:4–5 and 22:21 provide it with a formal epistolary framework (prescript and postscript). It is not clear, however, that the letter form has materially influenced its contents,<sup>80</sup> but its canonical positioning after *other* letters has the effect of making it another letter. This generic classification implies its circumstantial character, though writing to seven quite different churches (as evidenced by the contents of chapters 2–3) inevitably requires a more general approach after chapter 3. Its epistolary genre needs to be taken into account in exegesis,<sup>81</sup> rendering unlikely the supposition that Revelation offers a detailed timetable for human history. Its future orientation as “prophecy” (see Rev 1:3; 22:7, 9, 10, 18, 19) does not need to be denied, however, and this has probably determined its final position in the NT.

Revelation belongs appropriately, given its Johannine authorship (Rev 1:1, 4, 9), among the other non-Pauline letters.<sup>82</sup> As well, the theme of its final paragraph (22:18–21), the return of the Lord Jesus, and its warnings against adding or subtracting from the words “of this book,” make these words appropriate concluding remarks not just for one book (Revelation) but for the whole NT.<sup>83</sup> Though the warning of Rev 22:18–19 first and foremost applies to the book itself (as is clear from the wording), the “integrity formula”<sup>84</sup> is apposite by way of secondary application to the NT as a whole that it closes.

<sup>78</sup> First commented upon in Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 2.23.25.

<sup>79</sup> This is the order found in Sinaiticus, Alexandrinus, and Vaticanus.

<sup>80</sup> M. Karrer attempted a thorough-going analysis of Revelation as a letter; see his *Die Johannes-Offenbarung als Brief: Studien zu ihrem literarischen, historischen und theologischen Ort* (FRLANT 140; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1986).

<sup>81</sup> Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993) 12–17.

<sup>82</sup> For the implications of this, see William W. Klein, Craig L. Blomberg, and Robert L. Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Dallas: Word Books, 1993) 367–69.

<sup>83</sup> See Peter Balla, “Evidence for an Early Christian Canon (Second and Third Century),” in *The Canon Debate* (ed. L. M. McDonald and J. A. Sanders; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2002) 375.

<sup>84</sup> David E. Aune, *Revelation 17–22* (WBC 52c; Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998) 1208–13.

## V. CONCLUSION

By way of conclusion, the following comments may be made about the order(s) of the books that make up the NT. The ordering of books according to (decreasing) size is found a number of times, for example the Pauline epistles, both for the series of letters to churches (Romans–Thessalonians) and letters to individuals (1 Timothy–Philemon), and then also for 1, 2 Peter and 1, 2, 3 John. This may appear a largely arbitrary rationale for ordering but it still influences reading; for example, it gives special prominence to Romans by placing it in premier position within the Pauline corpus.

Assumed common authorship did not ensure that Luke and Acts were placed side by side, nor was the Johannine corpus<sup>85</sup> (John's Gospel, 1, 2, 3 John, the Revelation of John<sup>86</sup>) collected together in one place. Such authorial connections do, however, imply the ready compatibility of the teaching that comes in the alternative generic forms of Gospel, Acts, and epistle. A different slant is given to Acts depending on whether it is followed by the Pauline Epistles or the General Epistles. Hebrews placed either among (other?) Pauline letters or at the head of the Catholic Epistles acts as a link between these two epistolary collections. Alternative orders of biblical books warn the reader against prescribing any one order as determinative for interpretation; rather, they encourage the thoughtful consideration of exegetical alternatives.

For the ordering of the books of the NT, considerations of genre dominate, resulting in the bringing together of the different books that make up the Four Gospel collection (plus Acts) and the corpora of Pauline and non-Pauline Epistles (with Revelation). This shows that genre is the leading factor in the assemblage of NT canonical aggregations.

A storyline thread also plays a part, so that the events of the life and ministry of Jesus are placed first (Gospels), then an account of the post-ascension spread of the message about Jesus (Acts), followed by letters addressed to churches that resulted from that proclamation (Letters), and completed by the final placement of Revelation that encourages a hermeneutic that stresses its futuristic orientation.

In almost every case, the positioning of a biblical book relative to other books in the canonical collection, whether in terms of the grouping in which it is placed, or the book(s) that follow or precede it, has hermeneutical significance for the reader who seeks meaning in the text. Consciously or unconsciously the reader's evaluation of a book is affected by the company it keeps, hence the importance of a deliberate examination of this aspect of the paratext of Scripture.

<sup>85</sup> There is no attempt to differentiate between the Johns in the titles, so that the (naïve) reader would assume their canonical identity.

<sup>86</sup> The earliest title used in manuscripts (X, C), see Metzger, *Textual Commentary* 662.