

## THE JOHANNINE CORPUS AND THE UNITY OF THE NEW TESTAMENT CANON

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**Abstract:** *The Johannine Corpus makes a significant contribution to the unity of the NT and the wide dispersal of the Johannine writings assists in this regard. The focus of the Gospel of John on a few miracles (“signs”) and its high Christology suit its location in fourth and final position in the Gospel corpus. Its canonical location makes it the interface between the Gospel corpus and the rest of the NT, where it bridges the evangelists’ portrait of Christ and Paul’s teaching about Jesus as the “Son of God.” Situated at this canonical seam, John’s Gospel also anticipates certain features of the book of Acts. Putting the Johannine Epistles alongside letters by James, Peter, and Jude in the Catholic Epistles implies the harmony of the teaching of the apostles and of the family of Jesus. Lastly, special prominence is given to Revelation by putting it in final position in the canon, where it brings together the witness of the OT and NT by describing the completion of the divine goal of renewing creation and restoring humanity through the person and work of Jesus Christ.*

**Key words:** *John, Johannine corpus, Gospel of John, canon, unity, Acts, Revelation*

The NT writings are connected by a network of authorial associations (e.g. Mark and Peter, Luke and Paul) that present the Gospels and epistles as alternate mediums for the same message that centers on Jesus Christ.<sup>1</sup> Along these lines, the Johannine corpus makes a special contribution to the unity of the NT witness to the person and work of Christ, and the unifying function of the Johannine corpus is all the more effective due to the fact that it includes literary works in several genres (Gospel, epistle, and apocalypse) and its components are not placed together but scattered throughout the NT canon.<sup>2</sup> In this article I argue that the wide dispersion of materials labelled Johannine assists in unifying the disparate contents of the NT canon and promotes a particular reading of the NT as a whole.<sup>3</sup> My main arguments are as follows: the climactic placement of John’s Gospel makes it the interface between the Four Gospel Corpus and the rest of the NT; in a number of significant ways John’s Gospel prepares for the presentation in the book of Acts; the teaching of the three Johannine Epistles is shown to be in harmony with that of

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<sup>1</sup> See e.g. Gregory Goswell, “Authorship and Anonymity in the New Testament Writings,” *JETS* 60.4 (2017): 733–49.

<sup>2</sup> These features are touched on by Markus Bockmuehl, *Seeing the Word: Refocusing New Testament Study* (Studies in Theological Interpretation; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 109.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Matthew Yates Emerson, *Christ and the New Creation: A Canonical Approach to the Theology of the New Testament* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2013). Emerson gives special prominence to the theology of John in his exploration of the theological significance of NT book order.

the letters of Peter, James, and Jude among which they are found; and the book of Revelation in final position sums up and puts its stamp on the theology of the NT as a whole.

## I. METHODOLOGY

Behind this study lies the presupposition that biblical book order is of hermeneutical import, for where a book is placed in relation to other canonical books generates expectations of what the book may be about. It has this effect because, as noted by Emerson, book order “provides a reading strategy that emphasizes certain things over others, which naturally colors interpretation.”<sup>4</sup> John Sailhamer coined the term “con-textuality” to give a label to this phenomenon, which is “the notion of the effect on meaning of the relative position of a biblical book within a prescribed order of reading.”<sup>5</sup> The arrangement of the books in the biblical canon reflects the interpretation of these books by the ancient readers responsible for their ordering and in turn provides contemporary readers with “an initial set of hermeneutical clues derived from consideration of both the placement and titles of NT writings, which are properties of their canonization.”<sup>6</sup> In other words, the order of the biblical books serves to guide how these texts are to be read.<sup>7</sup> In particular, books placed in apposition or put in the same canonical grouping are viewed as conversation partners, whose interaction takes priority over other possible intra-canonical linkages.

According to Francis Watson, the three basic collections found in the NT canon are the Gospels, Pauline Epistles, and Catholic Epistles, “with important structural roles for Acts in the middle and Revelation at the end.”<sup>8</sup> Watson rightly observes that “the canonical collections have their own independent reality and integrity, whatever the circumstances that brought them into being.”<sup>9</sup> In other words, none of the groupings came about by accident; rather, there is a definite logic to each (e.g. the ordering of the Pauline Epistles according to size). Johannine material is found in two out of three of these groupings (being excluded by definition from the Pauline corpus). These assemblages of books suggest that ancient

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 60. The thesis of Emerson is an attempt “to discern the reading strategy provided by the canonical order of the New Testament” (*Christ and the New Creation*, 68).

<sup>5</sup> *Introduction to Old Testament Theology: A Canonical Approach* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 213. See Emerson, *Christ and the New Creation*, 49–52, for his use of Sailhamer.

<sup>6</sup> Robert W. Wall, “Canonical Contexts and Canonical Conversations,” in *Between Two Horizons: Spanning New Testament Studies and Systematic Theology* (ed. Joel B. Green and Max Turner; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 175.

<sup>7</sup> For the theory behind this, see Gérard Genette, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation* (trans. Jane E. Lewin; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

<sup>8</sup> *The Fourfold Gospel: A Theological Reading of the New Testament Portraits of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016), 26; cf. David Trobisch, *Paul’s Letter Collection: Tracing the Origins* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 9–10. For these canonical aggregations, see also Tomas Bokedal, *The Formation and Significance of the Christian Biblical Canon: A Study in Text, Ritual and Interpretation* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2014), 150–53.

<sup>9</sup> Watson, *Fourfold Gospel*, 26.

readers viewed the relationship of John to the other gospels as having primacy over the connection of this gospel with other components of the Johannine corpus.

With regard to the distribution of the Johannine corpus throughout the NT writings, there is no textual evidence to suggest that its different components were ever placed next to each other (except for the conjoining of the three Johannine Epistles),<sup>10</sup> just as there is no indication of the collation of Luke-Acts in the Greek manuscript tradition, so that it would not be accurate to speak in terms of the “break-up” of Luke-Acts or of the Johannine corpus.<sup>11</sup> In fact, the *failure* to place works by the same author (or related authors) next to each other is a general feature of the organization of the NT canon, for “the fourfold gospel emphatically separates Luke from its historical-critical connection with Acts, John from the Johannine Epistles, Matthew from James, and perhaps Mark from Peter.”<sup>12</sup> Before rushing to *repair* the situation by *restoring* the Lukan or Johannine corpora, it would be well to attempt to comprehend (and perhaps appreciate) the “canon logic” on display in the organization of the NT as constructed by many hands over a long period of time. Having noted the broad features of the layout of the NT canon, we will look in turn at each member of the Johannine corpus and try to discern what its canonical function(s) may be.

## II. THE WRITINGS LINKED TO JOHN

The author of the Fourth Gospel, named John in the assigned title,<sup>13</sup> also has to his credit three epistles (1, 2, 3 John) and the book of Revelation, in which the author is finally named (Rev 1:1, 4, 9; 22:8). John the son of Zebedee is a credible candidate as “the beloved disciple” in the Fourth Gospel, given his prominence in the Synoptic Gospels as a member of the inner circle of disciples (along with Peter and James),<sup>14</sup> and he is the presumptive author of the Johannine corpus as a whole in its canonical form (replete with the common book titles). The identification is

<sup>10</sup> Charles E. Hill shows that various ancient Christian authors (e.g. Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria) were aware of the five items that make up the Johannine literary corpus, but he then goes further and argues that there is manuscript confirmation that all the Johannine works were gathered into one codex, as evidenced by the late third-century majuscule manuscript 0232 (P. Antinoopolis 12), which contains 2 John 1–9 on both sides of a single codex leaf, with the recto and verso numbered 164 and 165; see *The Johannine Corpus in the Early Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 449–59. This argument has, however, been effectively disputed by Michael J. Kruger, who shows that the codex in question would not have been large enough to contain all the Johannine materials; see “The Date and Content of P. Antinoopolis 12 (0232),” *NTS* 58.2 (2012): 254–71.

<sup>11</sup> Gregory Goswell, “The Place of the Book of Acts in Reading the NT,” *JETS* 59.1 (2016): 67–82.

<sup>12</sup> Bockmuehl, *Seeing the Word*, 109.

<sup>13</sup> For the early attestation of the names of the evangelists in the assigned titles (opening titles, running titles, and end titles), see Simon J. Gathercole, “The Titles of the Gospels in the Earliest New Testament Manuscripts,” *ZNW* 104.1 (2013): 33–76. As noted by Gathercole, in the case of a title for John’s Gospel, the earliest manuscript witnesses are  $\mathfrak{P}^{66}$  and  $\mathfrak{P}^{75}$  (early third century).

<sup>14</sup> Irenaeus describes the John of Revelation as “the Lord’s disciple” (*Haer.* 4.20.11; 4.30.4; 5.26.1; 5.35.2); cf. Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of John* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2003), 1:127–224; Lorne Zelyck, “Irenaeus and the Authorship of the Fourth Gospel,” in *The Origins of John’s Gospel* (ed. Stanley E. Porter and Hughson T. Ong; Johannine Studies 2; Leiden: Brill, 2016), 239–58.

avored by the fact that there is no attempt to differentiate between these Johns in the usual titles,<sup>15</sup> so that the intention of those responsible for the book titles is that readers are meant to assume their identity. The similar idioms used, namely “beginning,” “word,” and “life” (e.g. John 1:1, 4, 14; cf. 1 John 1:1), and the “witness/testimony” theme (1 John 1:2; 5:6–12; 3 John 3, 6, 12; Rev 1:9), support this supposition.<sup>16</sup> With regard to possible relations between 1 John and the Fourth Gospel, parallels in literary structure can be found; most notably, the prologue of 1 John recalls that of the gospel (1 John 1:1–2; John 1:1–5) and the purpose statement at 1 John 5:13 bears an obvious relation to John 20:31.<sup>17</sup> So, too, the “I am” sayings of Revelation that are a vehicle for its high Christology (e.g. 1:8, 17; 2:23; 21:6; 22:13, 16) can be compared to those in the Fourth Gospel.<sup>18</sup> The opening lines of 2 and 3 John announce the sender’s identity but no actual name (“the elder”);<sup>19</sup> however, the author’s general theological accents match those of the Fourth Evangelist (e.g. his love ethic and anti-docetic stance). In other words, despite the fact that the compositional relationship of John’s Gospel and the Johannine Epistles is a contested issue in contemporary NT studies,<sup>20</sup> from the viewpoint of their canonical presentation they are the work of one author.<sup>21</sup> On this basis, whatever the particular thematic emphases of the individual works, the Johannine writings are understood to give a unified witness to the truthfulness of the claim

<sup>15</sup> A point made by David Trobisch, *The First Edition of the New Testament* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 55; also Robert W. Wall, “The Apocalypse of the New Testament in Canonical Context,” in Robert W. Wall and Eugene E. Lemcio, *The New Testament as Canon: A Reader in Canonical Criticism* (JSNTSup 76; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992), 282–86.

<sup>16</sup> See the detailed discussion of similarities and differences provided by Raymond E. Brown, *The Epistles of John* (AB 30; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1982), 19–30, and Leon Morris, *The Revelation of St. John* (INTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969), 27–35.

<sup>17</sup> See Jean Zumstein, “Der Prozess der Relecture in der johanneischen Literatur,” *NTS* 42.3 (1996): 400, 403. This approach is carried forward by Malcolm Coombes, *1 John: The Epistle as a Relecture of the Gospel of John* (Preston, Victoria: Mosaic, 2013).

<sup>18</sup> See esp. Jörg Frey, “Erwägungen zum Verhältnis der Johannesapokalypse zu den übrigen Schriften des Corpus Johanneum,” in *Die johanneische Frage: Ein Lösungsversuch* (ed. Martin Hengel with Jörg Frey; WUNT 67; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1993), 399–402, though, as noted by Frey, in contrast to Jesus’s self-predication in John’s Gospel, the Apocalypse does not use this idiom when making Christological statements involving the images of manna, light, door, etc. (p. 402). As is true of the imagery in Revelation in general, the connection of the “I am” sayings is more with the OT than with the gospel. On this point, see R. H. Charles, *The Revelation of John* (ICC; 2 vols.; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1920), 1:31, who notes, for example, that “I am the first and the last” (Rev 1:17) is derived from Isa 44:6 and 48:12.

<sup>19</sup> Alan Culpepper, *John, the Son of Zebedee: The Life of a Legend* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1994), 83–84.

<sup>20</sup> See, e.g., the essays in R. Alan Culpepper and Paul N. Anderson, eds., *Communities in Dispute: Current Scholarship on the Johannine Epistles* (SBLECL 13; Atlanta: SBL, 2014). Andreas Köstenberger plausibly argues that the cosmic trial motif supports the view that one author with a consistent *Weltanschauung* stands behind the Gospel, epistles, and Revelation; see “The Cosmic Trial Motif in John’s Letters,” in *Communities in Dispute*, 157–78; idem, *A Theology of John’s Gospel and Letters* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 436–56.

<sup>21</sup> What I go on to argue is not materially affected if one chooses to adopt the position that the Johannine corpus reflects a school or community.

that the Christ, the Son of God, is Jesus (cf. the authorial statements of purpose in John 20:31 and 1 John 5:13).<sup>22</sup>

### III. THE FOURTH GOSPEL

The placement of the Gospels side-by-side in the Four Gospel Collection assumes and asserts the compatibility and complementarity of their non-harmonized presentations of the person and work of Jesus. This includes the strikingly different portrait of Jesus provided by John,<sup>23</sup> for there is no evidence that John seeks to replace the Synoptic Gospels.<sup>24</sup> On that point, Bauckham notes that the Fourth Evangelist is explicit as to his highly-selective depiction of Jesus's miracles (2:23; 3:2; 4:45; 20:30), his teaching to the crowds (7:14; 18:19–21) and his Galilean ministry (7:1). He appears to assume his readers' familiarity with at least some of the material that now is to be found in the Synoptic tradition, if not actual knowledge of one of the other written gospels; for example, he presumes that readers know of Jesus's upbringing in Nazareth (1:46: "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?") and the story of John's imprisonment (3:24: "For John had not yet been put in prison").<sup>25</sup> This *modus operandi* suits its location in fourth place in the lineup of gospels.

In the common ordering of the four Gospels, John is treated in effect as the climax of the four portraits of Jesus, coming at the end of the series and being markedly different from the preceding three gospels. Though there is no set order of the Gospels in patristic lists or discussions,<sup>26</sup> the order that is now standard in printed Bibles predominated in the Greek manuscript tradition. 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," and there is an extensive exposi-

<sup>22</sup> For the Johannine writings addressed to a Jewish Christian audience, dealing with the situation where previous members of the community were denying that the Christ is Jesus, see Matthew D. Jensen, "John Is No Exception: Identifying the Subject of *εἶμι* and Its Implications," *JBL* 135.2 (2016): 341–353.

<sup>23</sup> For an enumeration of the prominent differences, see Watson, *Fourfold Gospel*, 86–87.

<sup>24</sup> Richard Bauckham, *Gospel of Glory: Major Themes in Johannine Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015), 185–201.

<sup>25</sup> Note the allusive comments in John 1:40; 4:44; 6:67, 71; 11:2; 18:24, 28; see Craig L. Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of John's Gospel* (Leicester, UK: Apollos, 2001), 46–49; Andreas J. Köstenberger, *Encountering John* (Encountering Biblical Studies; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 36–37. This does not mean interpreting John in a Synoptic frame, rather it should be read on its own terms, as per John A. T. Robinson, *The Priority of John* (ed. J. F. Coakley; London: SCM, 1985).

<sup>26</sup> There is, for example, the so-called "Western" order (codices Bezae [D], Washington [W] and  $\mathfrak{P}^{45}$ ) in which Mark and John swap places, namely: Matthew, John, Luke, Mark. Its rationale appears to be to give pride of place to the two Gospels attributed to apostles. Nine sequences are discussed by Bruce M. Metzger, *The Canon of the New Testament: Its Origin, Development, and Significance* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), 295–97, and an inventory of twelve different sequences is provided in Pierre-Maurice Bogaert, "Ordres anciens des évangiles et tétraévangile en un seul codex," *RTL* 30.3 (1999): 297–314.

tion of this theme).<sup>27</sup> John records fewer miracles than do any of the Synoptics, but the ones he does choose to narrate are particularly impressive:<sup>28</sup> producing a huge quantity of wine; healing a sick boy at a distance; healing a man who had been lame for 38 years; providing food for 5,000 people; healing a man born blind; and raising a man who had been dead for four days. The Johannine “signs” have an important element of christological symbolism, bringing miracle and dominical teaching closer together than is the case in the Synoptic Gospels.<sup>29</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.

As for the canonical significance of the last verse of John’s Gospel, the conventional hyperbole contained in 21:25 makes an appropriate ending to this Gospel with its selective focus on a few larger cameos: “But there are also many other things which Jesus did, . . .” (cf., e.g., 1 Macc 9:22: “Now the rest of the acts of Judas [Maccabeus] . . . have not been recorded, for they are very many”). This harks back to John 20:30: “Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book.” Irrespective of whether or not 21:25 does allude to one or more of the Synoptics (that cannot be certain),<sup>30</sup> given its reference to “books” (plural), this Johannine codicil is a fitting end-marker for the Gospel Corpus as a whole with three other portraits of Jesus preceding (“were every one of them to be written, I suppose the world itself could not contain the *books* that would be written”).<sup>31</sup> John is placed fourth in the line-up and the self-reference to “this book” (20:30) can also be taken as an implicit acknowledgement of *other* books, namely the three preceding Gospels. This is not a claim that any other order of the four Gospels is impossible; I only seek to show the effect of the present (and majority) canonical sequence on reading.

John’s longer discourses provide a profound recasting of Jesus’s teaching such as is appropriate for those who have already read and digested the preceding three Gospels.<sup>32</sup> Before this is attributed to unbridled creativity on the part of the author of the Fourth Gospel, it would be well to note the suggestion of J. A. T.

<sup>27</sup> Leon Morris strives to connect the seven Johannine signs (according to his tabulation) with seven dominical discourses; see his table in *Jesus Is the Christ: Studies in the Theology of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 23.

<sup>28</sup> I am dependent on Bauckham at this point; see *Gospel of Glory*, 188–89.

<sup>29</sup> See Dorothy A. Lee, *The Symbolic Narratives of the Fourth Gospel: The Interplay of Form and Meaning* (JNSTSup 95; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994); Craig R. Koester, *Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel: Meaning, Mystery, Community* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003), chap. 3: “Symbolic Actions.”

<sup>30</sup> D. Moody Smith views this as a real possibility; see “When Did the Gospels Become Scripture?” *JBL* 119.1 (2000): 13, 19.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Trobisch, *First Edition of the New Testament*, 78, 97–101, who widens this to include John 21 as a whole.

<sup>32</sup> Köstenberger, *Encountering John*, 198–200; D. Moody Smith Jr., “Johannine Christianity: Some Reflections on its Character and Delineation,” *NTS* 21.2 (1975): 222–48, esp. 228–33. Andreas Köstenberger thinks in terms of Johannine “transpositions” of the Synoptic tradition (using Mark and possibly also Luke); see “John’s Transposition Theology: Retelling the Story of Jesus in a Different Key,” in *Earliest Christian History: History, Literature, and Theology: Essays from the Tyndale Fellowship in Honor of Martin Hengel* (ed. Michael F. Bird and Jason Maston; WUNT 2/320; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012), 191–226.

Robinson: “the process may be one of deepening truth rather than falsification or fiction.”<sup>33</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>34</sup> The idiolect of the Johannine Jesus is not unconnected with the manner in which Jesus speaks of the relation of Father and Son and of the Son’s unique revelatory role in the Synoptic Gospels, 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>35</sup> A second instance of the Synoptic use of “Son” language is the saying found on the lips of Jesus about the timing of the end in Mark 13:32 (// Matt 24:36), but it must be acknowledged that such instances are rare. What we have in John, therefore, is a faithful paraphrastic representation of Jesus’s teaching.

In John’s Gospel, there are seven positive references to Jesus as the “Son of God” (1:49; 3:18; 5:25; 10:36; 11:4, 27; 20:31), and one that is disparaging (19:7). Likewise, there are seven uses of the title in 1 John (3:8; 4:15; 5:5, 10, 12, 13, 20), clustered toward the end of the letter. The tally of seven instances in each case is hardly accidental and suggests the presence of numerical symbolism as a way of underlining its thematic significance.<sup>36</sup> Of course, Jesus is the Son of God in the Synoptic Gospels, too, but it is others rather than Jesus who designate him using this term: the angel Gabriel (Luke 1:35); Satan (Matt 4:3, 6 [// Luke 4:3, 9]); demons (Mark 3:11; Luke 4:41; Mark 5:7 [// Matt 8:29]; Luke 8:28); the Twelve (Matt 14:33); Peter (Matt 16:16); the high priest (Matt 26:63 [// Luke 22:70]); his mockers (Matt 27:40, 43); and the centurion (Mark 15:39 [// Matt 27:54]).<sup>37</sup> The significance of this listing is that recognition of his divine sonship is not a natural human accomplishment but comes only by special revelatory insight, or else the people using the title “Son of God” are depicted as saying more than they realize to be true (expressing incredulity or speaking in jest). On the other hand, in John’s Gospel Jesus regularly refers to himself as the Son, and even more often he speaks of the Father

<sup>33</sup> *Priority of John*, 299.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 342 (emphasis original). For the issue of Johannine diction, see also Craig L. Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of the Gospels* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.; Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2007), 231–36.

<sup>35</sup> See the discussion provided in A. M. Hunter, “Crux Criticorum—Matt XI. 25–30: A Re-appraisal,” *NTS* 8.3 (1962): 241–49; Joachim 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; BETL 101; Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1992), 163–99; Douglas McCready, *He Came Down from Heaven: The Pre-existence of Christ and the Christian Faith* (Leicester, UK: Apollon, 2005), 108–12. More generally, see Peter W. Ensor, “Johannine Sayings of Jesus and the Question of Authenticity,” in *Challenging Perspectives on the Gospel of John* (ed. John Lierman; WUNT 2/219; 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.

<sup>36</sup> For the use of heptads in John’s Gospel (the seven “I am” sayings, etc.), see Michael A. Daise, *Feasts in John: Jewish Festivals and Jesus’ “Hour” in the Fourth Gospel* (WUNT 2/229; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007), 32–34.

<sup>37</sup> Köstenberger, *Theology of John’s Gospel and Letters*, 383 n. 166. In addition, the evangelist Mark designates him “the Son of God” (Mk 1:1), and God (the Father) announces that Jesus is his “beloved Son” (Mark 1:11 [// Matt 3:17; Luke 3:22]; 9:7 [// Matt 17:5; Luke 9:35]).

in an absolute sense that implies his own unique sonship (e.g. John 5:17; 11:41; 16:32).

In accordance the program of consecutive reading implicit in the canonical order of the four Gospels, the reader of the Fourth Gospel is in a position to appreciate what is said by Jesus about himself after being prepared through reading the first three Gospels. In canonical terms, John can be understood as making explicit the deeper Christological implications of the Synoptic portrait of Jesus's words and deeds. What this means for a canonical reading of the NT as a whole is that Johannine diction is an important bridge between the portrait of Jesus in Four Gospel Corpus and the Pauline corpus, in which the "Son of God" is a key term in Paul's gospel preaching (e.g. Rom 1:3–4; 8:3–4; Gal 2:20; 4:4–5; 1 Thess 1:9–10).<sup>38</sup> I am not claiming that Paul derived his teaching about Jesus directly or indirectly from John (or that John drew on Paul), but I am asserting that the presence of John's Gospel in the canon enables the Christian reader to see that a high Christology of divine sonship is common to the Four Gospel Collection and the Pauline corpus. Without John, the gap between the evangelists' portrait of Jesus and Pauline teaching about Jesus would be much wider (though by no means unbridgeable).<sup>39</sup> This canonical role is assisted by the strategic placement of John's Gospel in fourth position where it is the interface between the Four Gospel Corpus and the other NT writings.

#### IV. JOHN'S GOSPEL AND ACTS

The Gospel of John stands at the canonical seam between the Gospel Corpus and the rest of the NT and another way in which it functions as a link between the two is that it paves the way for the certain developments described in the book of Acts. The rehabilitation of Peter (John 21:15–19) and the extensive teaching about the Spirit's post-Easter role in John's Gospel (chaps. 14–16), according to Robert Wall, "signify the important role that John's Gospel performs in preparing the reader for the story of Acts,"<sup>40</sup> so that the connection of Acts with the ministry of Jesus is by no means limited to links with Luke's Gospel.

Without John 21, there is no explicit explanation of the restoration of Peter to a position of leadership among the disciples, though it is plain that he has resumed such a position in the early chapters of Acts (e.g. Acts 1:15: "In those days Peter stood up among the brethren ..."). It would be going too far, however, to insist that the documenting of the scene of Peter's reinstatement is strictly required, for

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<sup>38</sup> Seyoon Kim, "Jesus the Son of God as the Gospel (1 Thess 1:9–10 and Rom 1:3–4)," in *Earliest Christian History*, 117–41. For a recent argument that Paul may have seen Jesus and heard firsthand some of his teaching, see Stanley E. Porter, *When Paul Met Jesus: How an Idea Got Lost in History* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

<sup>39</sup> See, e.g., Simon J. Gathercole, *The Preexistent Son: Recovering the Christologies of Matthew, Mark, and Luke* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 174–76, 295, who finds ten Synoptic "I have come" sayings that refer to the advent of Jesus from heaven, and so share with John's Gospel the idea of Jesus's preexistence.

<sup>40</sup> "The Acts of the Apostles," *NIB* 10:30.



certainly the author of the Gospel of Luke did not see it that way, for he only recorded a brief statement to the effect that “the Lord has risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon” (24:34; cf. Luke 22:32; Mark 16:7).

The “witness” theme, though common to both books, is not handled in exactly the same way in John and Acts. In the Gospel, Jesus claims in 5:39 (“it is they [the OT Scriptures] that bear witness about me”), and the OT is one of several “witnesses” to him, which include his own words (5:31), his Father (5:32, 37), John (5:33), Jesus’s works (5:36) and Moses (5:46). The disciples join these other witnesses in the cosmic trial (15:26–27), whose outcome is the vindication of Jesus and condemnation of the world that has rejected him. There is a striking similarity between John 15:27, where Jesus says to his disciples, to whom he has just promised the Spirit (15:26), “You also are witnesses (μαρτυρεῖτε), because you have been with me from the beginning (ἀπ’ ἀρχῆς),” and the identical equipping and specified qualifications of those who will be witnesses in Acts 1 (vv. 8, 21–22). In Acts, however, the role of the apostles is as witnesses *to the resurrection* (1:8, 22; 2:32; 3:15; etc.), something not said as such in John’s Gospel. The fact that the fit is not exact between John and Acts shows that the noted connections do not require the thesis that either author knew of or was reacting to the work of the other, rather the thematic resemblances function on a canonical level.

Further connections between John and Acts can be postulated.<sup>41</sup> One is the association of Peter and “the beloved disciple” (John) in the later chapters of John’s Gospel (13:21–30; 18:15–18; 20:1–10; 21:4–8, 20–24), which is picked up by allusions to the partnership of Peter and John in gospel ministry in the early chapters of Acts (3:1; 4:13; 8:14). What is more, in the listing of the names of the eleven disciples who are in the upper room (Acts 1:13), as is invariably the case in such lists, the first recorded name is that of Peter, but then follows John (ὁ τε Πέτρος καὶ Ἰωάννης), joined by James and Andrew (with all four names joined by conjunctions). The coupling of Peter and John in this way in an apostolic list is unprecedented. In Matt 10:2–4, Simon Peter is paired with “Andrew his brother”; in Mark 3:16–19, those joined are “James the son of Zebedee and John the brother of James”; and in Luke 6:13–16, again it is “Simon, whom he named Peter, and Andrew his brother.” What this suggests is that from the start of Acts, the writer has in mind that Peter and John were partners in the mission of bearing witness to the

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<sup>41</sup> See, e.g., C. K. Barrett, “The Parallels between Acts and John,” in *Exploring the Gospel of John: In Honor of D. Moody Smith* (ed. R. Alan Culpepper and C. Clifton Black; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996), 163–78. Among the points made by Barrett, both John and Acts are concerned for the proper estimation of the relative importance of Jesus and John the Baptist (e.g. John 1:6–8, 15, 24–37; 3:22–30; 10:40–42; Acts 19:1–7), and both books describe the evangelization of the Samaritans (John 4; Acts 8). Cf. Pierson Parker, “When Acts Sides with John,” in *Understanding the Sacred Text: Essays in Honor of Morton S. Enslin on the Hebrew Bible and Christian Beginnings* (ed. John Reumann; Valley Forge, PA: Judson, 1972), 203–15; idem, “The Kinship of John and Acts,” in *Christianity, Judaism, and Other Greco-Roman Cults: Studies for Morton Smith at Sixty*, vol. 1: *New Testament* (ed. Jacob Neusner; SJLA 12; Leiden: Brill, 1975), 187–205.

resurrection of Jesus,<sup>42</sup> but their future partnership is already anticipated in John 20, where both men race to the tomb and discover that it is empty (vv. 1–10).

Another connection between John and Acts is the marked focus on resurrection in both books. Each of the four Gospels concludes with an account of the resurrection of Jesus (Matthew 28; Mark 16; Luke 24; John 20–21), but the material in John is the most extensive of the four, and the special interest of the author is indicated by his numbering of the appearances to the disciples (21:14: “This was now the third time ...” [cf. his numbering of the signs in 2:11 and 4:54]). What is more, the raising of Lazarus, not mentioned in the Synoptics, becomes the climactic seventh “sign” in the Gospel of John (chap. 11),<sup>43</sup> and in this Gospel it is the raising of Lazarus that precipitates the plot against Jesus’s life (11:16, 45–53; 12:9–11). What Jesus did for Lazarus leads directly to his own suffering and death and also anticipates his resurrection. In Acts, the theme of resurrection is just as prominent, for the proclamation of the gospel messengers (Paul included) is centred on the resurrection (e.g. 13:30–37; 17:18, 31; 23:6–10; 24:21; 25:19; 26:8).

Finally, as noted by Barrett,<sup>44</sup> in John 17 Jesus prays not only for the immediate apostolic band “but also for those who are to believe ... through their word” (17:20), and this prayer amounts to an anticipation and summary of the gospel mission and its results as described in Acts. Jesus’s stress in John’s Gospel on the love bond between believers (13:34–35) and his repeated prayer that they be “one” (17:11, 21, 22) come to fulfilment in the fellowship of goods in the early Christian community (Acts 2:44; 4:32; also 6:1–6; 11:27–30), and in line with this, a major concern throughout Acts is the gospel unity of believers.<sup>45</sup> The proposal that there is a conceptual link between John 17 and the united missionary efforts in Acts receives support from the fact that the unity of believers of which Jesus speaks reflects the unity of Father and Son, a unity that is seen most clearly in the sending of God’s Son, and the unity of believers in mission will cause the world to come to faith (17:21: “so that the world may believe that thou hast sent me”).<sup>46</sup>

## V. THE JOHANNINE EPISTLES

Seven epistles are grouped together under the title “Catholic Epistles,” with the epithet used in the sense of universal (e.g. the *inscriptio* ἐπιστολῆ Ἰακώβου

<sup>42</sup> So also C. K. Barrett, *The Acts of the Apostles* (ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994), 1:87. It is true, however, that Peter, John, and James (in that order) become an inner circle of the disciples as the ministry of Jesus progresses (Luke 8:51; 9:28).

<sup>43</sup> It is the *seventh* sign if the temple cleansing (2:14–22) is viewed as a sign; see Andreas J. Köstenberger, “The Seventh Johannine Sign: A Study in John’s Christology,” *BBR* 5 (1995): 87–103.

<sup>44</sup> Barrett, “Parallels between Acts and John,” 172.

<sup>45</sup> See Andrew C. Clark, *Parallel Lives: The Relation of Paul to the Apostles in the Lucan Perspective* (Paternoster Biblical and Theological Monographs; Carlisle, UK: Paternoster, 2001), 29: “it is the issues of the identity and unity of the people of God which are Luke’s main concern”; and Alan J. Thompson, *One Lord, One People: The Unity of the Church in Acts in Its Literary Setting* (LNTS 359; London: T&T Clark, 2008).

<sup>46</sup> See the helpful discussion provided by Johan Ferreira, *Johannine Ecclesiology* (JSNTSup 160; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 126–34. Ferreira does not, however, note any connection of these ideas with Acts.

καθολικῆ [“the Catholic Letter of James”]).<sup>47</sup> This reflects the fact that (except for 2, 3 John) they are not addressed to any named church or individual, and so are named according to who *wrote* them. The Johannine Epistles are part of this larger epistolary grouping, and the limitation of the letters to seven is another way in which their universal scope and application is indicated to readers.<sup>48</sup> This understanding is supported by the breadth of the readership addressed (e.g. Jas 1:1: “To the twelve tribes in the Dispersion”; 1 Pet 1:1: “To the exiles of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia”), though the addressees are not strictly without geographical limitation. The implication is that 2 Peter is written to the same wide readership as the first letter (3:1). James presents itself as an encyclical to Diaspora believers and that claim (according to Richard Bauckham) means resisting the tendency in some scholarly circles to envisage a specific “community of James.”<sup>49</sup> First John addresses a church where a group has seceded (2:19), and the secession is described as typical of “the last hour” (2:18), so that it is relevant to all churches, both present and future. The metaphor “the elect lady and her children” would seem to address a number of churches in the Elder’s circle of influence (2 John 1), so that it also can be viewed as an encyclical.<sup>50</sup> As well, 1 John 2:19 alludes to more than a local dispute, given the generalizing reference to “many antichrists” (2:18) and “many false prophets” (4:1; cf. 2 John 7: “many deceivers”). Indeed, the lack of specifics in 1 John facilitates its (now) general application within the corpus of Catholic Epistles. Jude can also be understood as addressed to a geographically diffuse audience (v. 1: “To those who are called, beloved in God the Father and kept for Jesus Christ”).

With regard to the structure of the Catholic Epistles, letters by the same author are kept together (e.g. 1, 2 Peter) and, as in the case of the Pauline letters, are ordered according to length (from longest to shortest).<sup>51</sup> In their common order, the letters attributed to James and Jude, the two half-brothers of Jesus, form an envelope (*inclusio*) around the apostolic letters of Peter and John.<sup>52</sup> Placing the letters of Peter and John side-by-side asserts the compatibility of their witness to

<sup>47</sup> For details of inscriptions and subscriptions, see NA<sup>27</sup> 588, 598, 608, 615, 625, 627–28, 743–45.

<sup>48</sup> First commented upon in Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 2.23.23–25 (PG 20.205). For a canonical history of the grouping, whose present shape is of Eastern origin, see David R. Nienhuis, *Not by Paul Alone: The Formation of the Catholic Epistles Collection and the Christian Canon* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2007), 29–97, esp. 76–79. In his reading of the corpus, Nienhuis focuses on what he argues is the late addition of James as the “frontispiece” of the collection. See also David R. Nienhuis and Robert W. Wall, *Reading the Epistles of James, Peter, John, and Jude as Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013), 17–39.

<sup>49</sup> *James: Wisdom of James, Disciple of Jesus the Sage* (ed. John Court; NT Readings; London: Routledge, 1999), 25–28.

<sup>50</sup> John Painter, “The Johannine Epistles as Catholic Epistles,” in *The Catholic Epistles and Apostolic Tradition* (ed. Karl-Wilhelm Niebuhr and Robert W. Wall; Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2009), 249–50.

<sup>51</sup> This is the order found in Sinaiticus, Alexandrinus, and Vaticanus; cf. Karl-Wilhelm Niebuhr, “Exegese im kanonischen Zusammenhang: Überlegungen zur theologischen Relevanz der Gestalt des neutestamentlichen Kanons,” in *The Biblical Canons* (ed. J.-M. Auwers and H. J. De Jonge; BETL 163; Leuven: Peeters, 2003), 578–81. For variations in the order of the Catholic Epistles, see Metzger, *Canon of the New Testament*, 299–300.

<sup>52</sup> E.g. John Painter, *1, 2, and 3 John* (SP 18; Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2002), 33–36.

Christ, and this becomes a final canonical affirmation of the close association between Peter and “the beloved disciple” (John) such as plotted in the final chapters of John’s Gospel. It also picks up the allusions to the partnership of Peter and John in gospel ministry in the early chapters of Acts. In fact, their bold joint-insistence on the truth of the resurrection of Jesus (Acts 4:20: “for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard”) is echoed in the opening of 1 John (v. 1: “which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes”).<sup>53</sup> With their epistles juxtaposed, Peter and John continue to speak in unison, testifying to the solidarity of the Petrine and Johannine traditions. 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, also help to unify the 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, reflecting the order of the “pillars” in Gal 2:9.<sup>54</sup> The celebrity and personal interaction of the three men in Acts (chaps. 1–8, 11–12; 15, 21) was probably another factor.<sup>55</sup> Jude, however, is well situated after the discussion about false teachers in the Letters of 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. vv. 18, 21) anticipates and helps to smooth the path for Revelation that follows it in the common ordering of the books.

The Vulgate determined the order of books within the Western Bible (Protestant and Catholic) and placed Acts between the Gospels and the Pauline Epistles;<sup>56</sup> however, in all Greek textual witnesses, Acts prefaces the Catholic Letters and these are treated as a fixed and coherent canonical unit (*Praxapostolos*).<sup>57</sup> For example, in codices Vaticanus (B 03) and Alexandrinus (A 02) the order is Gospels, Acts-Catholic Epistles followed by Pauline Epistles, but Sinaiticus (Ⲙ 01) has the arrangement: Gospels, Pauline Epistles, and Acts-Catholic Epistles. Their canonical location in the manuscript tradition as part of the *Praxapostolos* implies certain things about the function of the three letters of John, one being that first and foremost they should be read in relation to the other (non-Johannine) letters among which they stand,<sup>58</sup> rather than as components of a wider Johannine body of literature and perhaps responding to heretical (proto-Gnostic?) misreadings of

<sup>53</sup> As noted by Nienhuis and Wall, *Reading*, 161. According to Matthew D. Jensen, 1 John was written to affirm the resurrection of Jesus (e.g. the claim to have seen and handled the risen Christ in 1 John 1:1; cf. John 20:24–29); see *Affirming the Resurrection of the Incarnate Christ: A Reading of 1 John* (SNTSMS 153; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 60–65.

<sup>54</sup> See the discussion provided by Darian R. Lockett, *Letters from the Pillar Apostles: The Formation of the Catholic Epistles as a Canonical Collection* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2017), 102–3.

<sup>55</sup> Noted by Niebuhr, “Exegese,” 571, 579.

<sup>56</sup> See Samuel Berger, *Histoire de la Vulgate: pendant les premiers siècles du moyen âge* (Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1976), 339. For listings of alternative orders within the Latin tradition, see Berger, *Histoire de la Vulgate*, 339–41.

<sup>57</sup> See the listing provided in UBS<sup>4</sup>, 6\*–18\*; see also David C. Parker, *An Introduction to the New Testament Manuscripts and their Texts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 283–86.

<sup>58</sup> Painter touches on this point, but then does not allow it to influence his own study of the Johannine Epistles (“Johannine Epistles as Catholic Epistles,” 249, 295).

the Fourth Gospel by secessionists.<sup>59</sup> For those who framed the canon, their positioning of the Johannine Epistles in the Catholic Epistles shows that the relation of the Johannine Epistles to other non-Pauline letters was given priority as an index for interpretation over their connection with either John's Gospel or Revelation.

In this regard, for all their differences, the letters that make up the Catholic Epistles have a number of themes in common,<sup>60</sup> for example, the apostles' eyewitness experience of the glorified and resurrected Jesus (1 Pet 5:1; 2 Pet 1:16–18; 1 John 1:1–3);<sup>61</sup> the apostolic tradition that embodies the truth about Jesus (2 Pet 3:2; Jude 17); the danger posed by false prophets (2 Pet 2:1; 1 John 4:1); the love command (Jas 2:8; 1 Pet 1:22; 2:17; 3:8; 2 Pet 1:7; 1 John 2:7–11; 3:10–11, 14, 23; 4:7, 11; 5:1–2; 2 John 5–6; 3 John 6);<sup>62</sup> the ethic of the community of goods (Jas 2:14–17; 3:17; 1 Pet 3:13–17; 2 Pet 2:3; 1 John 3:17–20; 2 John 10); the practice of hospitality (1 Pet 1:22; 4:9–11; 2 John 9–11; 3 John 5–8); the prospect of the Lord's coming (Jas 5:7; 1 Pet 5:4; 2 Pet 3:1–13; 1 John 2:28; Jude 24–25); and the conclusions of three of the seven letters call for the rescue of those who have wandered from the faith (Jas 5:19–20; 1 John 5:16–17; Jude 22–23). The overall impression is of the harmony of the teaching of the half-brothers of Jesus (James/Jude) and the apostles (Peter/John), which is just what we would expect after the presentation of the prefacing book of Acts. In that light, the appropriate method of interpretation is to allow the neighboring letters to inform our reading of the Johannine Epistles (and vice versa).

## VI. THE REVELATION OF JOHN

The title “Revelation” (Ἀποκάλυψις) is an incipit, taken from the first Greek word in the book (1:1: “The revelation of Jesus Christ”), with Rev 1:1–2 amounting to a superscription for the book. The sense of the opening words is that this writing contains “the revelation *from* Jesus Christ,”<sup>63</sup> who is the mediator of God's revelation to believers. This title would appear to separate it from the letter category, even though it can be said to start with seven letters to churches (chaps. 2–3). In codices Sinaiticus and Ephraemi Rescriptus (C 04) the book is entitled “The Revelation of John” (Ἀποκάλυψις Ἰωαν[ν]οῦ), and this is the form found in the superscription in Alexandrinus, for John is the prophetic mouthpiece used by the Lord

<sup>59</sup> Nienhuis and Wall, *Reading*, 47 (thinking, e.g., of the theory of Brown, *The Epistles of John*, 69–115).

<sup>60</sup> For what follows, see Robert W. Wall, “A Unifying Theology of the Catholic Epistles: A Canonical Approach,” in *The Catholic Epistles and the Tradition* (ed. J. Schlosser; BETL 176; Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2004), 43–71.

<sup>61</sup> Cf. Lockett, *Letters from the Pillar Apostles*, 181–82.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 201–9.

<sup>63</sup> David E. Aune argues that Ἀποκάλυψις Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ is a subjective genitive, with this interpretation supported by the succeeding clause “which God gave him” (*Revelation 1–5* [WBC 52a; Dallas: Word, 1997], 6). The opening verses outline a communicative chain: from God to Jesus Christ to his angel to his servant John to the churches.

Jesus to speak to the churches (cf. 1:1: “which he made known to his servant John”). This simple title subsequently received many additions and elaborations.<sup>64</sup>

The title “Revelation” (or Apocalypse) was later viewed as a genre designation, and indeed it has given its name to a genre (apocalyptic), but in the book itself this is the only time the term is used. John is not describing his composition as belonging to the literary type called “apocalypse,” nor does it appear that non-canonical apocalyptic works (mostly to be found in the Pseudepigrapha) are the context within which the writer wishes his own work to be interpreted.<sup>65</sup> It is likely that Ἀποκάλυψις is an allusion to Daniel 2 (LXX/Theodotion),<sup>66</sup> wherein the verb ἀποκαλύπτω (“to reveal”) is used up to six times, for the writer of Revelation draws heavily upon Daniel as also upon other OT prophetic works. Within the book itself, this writing of John is termed a prophecy (Rev 1:3: “the words of the prophecy”) and there is the similarly worded 22:7, 10, 18 (“the words of the prophecy of this book”) and 22:19 (“the words of the book of this prophecy”) that form an *inclusio* around the book as a whole. As well, the verb “to prophesy” (προφητεύω) is used in 10:11 to describe the writer’s prophetic task: “Then I was told, ‘You must again prophesy about many peoples and nations and tongues and kings.’”<sup>67</sup> There is no actual quotation from the OT prophets (nor of any OT book, for that matter), but prophetic images, allusions, and phraseology form the warp and woof of the work.<sup>68</sup> The common title as an incipit is innocent enough, but its danger is that it may obfuscate the book’s main connection, which is to OT prophecy.

On the other hand, Revelation with its letters and vision addressed to actual churches is probably to be seen as a circular letter (*Rundbrief*) to seven Asian churches, appropriating the letter form to transmit its prophetic vision, and this is in accordance with OT precedent, for prophets were known to write letters (e.g. Jeremiah 29; cf. the apocryphal works of Baruch and the Epistle of Jeremiah). The number seven is significant in Revelation (e.g. seven seals, seven trumpets), and in this case the numerology suggests that the instructions to these particular churches

<sup>64</sup> For details, see Bruce M. Metzger, *The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption and Restoration* (2nd ed.; Oxford: Clarendon, 1968), 205; see the extensive collation of elaborated titles provided by H. C. Hoskier, *Concerning the Text of the Apocalypse: Collations of All Existing Greek Documents with the Standard Text of Stephen’s Third Edition Together with the Testimony of Versions, Commentaries, and Fathers: A Complete Conspectus of All Authorities, Two Volumes* (London: Bernard Quaritch, 1929), 2:25–27.

<sup>65</sup> A point made by Bruce W. Jones, “More about the Apocalypse as Apocalyptic,” *JBL* 87.3 (1968): 325–27, esp. 325 n. 1.

<sup>66</sup> The suggestion is that of G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 181.

<sup>67</sup> David Aune, *Prophecy in Early Christianity and the Ancient Mediterranean World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 274–88. For John as a prophet, though not specifically called that, see John Christopher Thomas and Frank D. Macchia, *Revelation* (THNTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016), 36–39.

<sup>68</sup> See G. K. Beale, *John’s Use of the Old Testament in Revelation* (JSNTSup 166; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998); UBS<sup>4</sup> 896–900 for allusions and verbal parallels of prophetic books in Revelation; H. B. Swete, *The Apocalypse of St John* (3rd ed.; London: Macmillan, 1909), cxl–clviii, which identifies half the uses as from Psalms (27 times), Isaiah (46), Ezekiel (29) and Daniel (31) (cliii n. 1). See Richard Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy: Studies on the Book of Revelation* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1993), wherein he argues that the book presents itself as the summation of the whole biblical tradition of prophecy (esp. chaps. 5, 9).

are intended as normative for all churches. The seven churches are addressed in general in Rev 1:4 and then listed by name in 1:11. 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 overall contents,<sup>69</sup> but its canonical positioning after *other* letters (including three from John) supports the supposition that it is another letter.<sup>70</sup> This generic classification implies its circumstantial character,<sup>71</sup> though writing to seven quite different churches (as evidenced by the contents of chaps. 2–3) inevitably requires a quite general approach after chapter 3.

As well, the theme of its last 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>72</sup> In other words, there is a wider canonical significance to the final warning (“if any one adds to them . . . , and if any one takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, . . .”). The threat uttered by the risen Christ to any who add to its words is that they will experience the plagues that accompany the opening of the seven seals or trumpeting of the seven angels or the last seven plagues of Revelation 15–16. The threat against those who subtract from its words is loss of a share in “the tree of life and in the holy city” (described in 22:1–22:5). While its immediate application is to warn against tampering with the text of the book in which it is found itself (as is clear from the wording), the “integrity formula” is apposite by way of secondary application to the NT as a whole that it brings to a close (cf. Sinaiticus, Alexandrinus, and Ephraemi Rescriptus).<sup>73</sup>

The book of Revelation stands in last position in the vast preponderance of ancient canonical lists and manuscripts, though it follows the gospels in a few instances.<sup>74</sup> This less common position can be explained by the fact that Revelation

<sup>69</sup> Martin Karrer attempted an analysis of Revelation as a letter: *Die Johannesoffenbarung als Brief: Studien zu ihrem literarischen, historischen und theologischen Ort* (FRLANT 140; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1986).

<sup>70</sup> Cf. Ched Spellman, *Toward a Canon-Conscious Reading of the Bible: Exploring the History and Hermeneutics of the Canon* (NT Monographs 34; Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2014), 139: “One effect of these seven letters is that they structurally and thematically bind the book of Revelation to the rest of the New Testament documents.”

<sup>71</sup> Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 12–17.

<sup>72</sup> Peter Balla, “Evidence for an Early Christian Canon (Second and Third Century),” in *The Canon Debate* (ed. Lee M. McDonald and James A. Sanders; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2002), 375.

<sup>73</sup> As noted by Michael J. Kruger, *The Question of Canon: Challenging the Status Quo in the New Testament Debate* (Nottingham, UK: Apollos, 2013), 63; Konrad Huber and Martin Hasitschka, “Die Offenbarung des Johannes in Kanon der Bibel: Textinterner Geltungsanspruch und Probleme der kanonischen Rezeption,” in *Biblical Canons*, 612 n. 17; Külli Töniste, *The Ending of the Canon: A Canonical and Intertextual Reading of Revelation 21–22* (LNTS 526; London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2016), 189–92. For the high value placed on the preservation of texts that were early regarded as Scripture, see Michael J. Kruger, “Early Christian Attitudes toward the Reproduction of Texts,” in *The Early Text of the New Testament* (ed. Charles E. Hill and Michael J. Kruger; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 63–80.

<sup>74</sup> Metzger, *Canon of the New Testament*, 295 n. 1 (cf. the details of the manuscripts provided by UBS<sup>4</sup> 10\*–18\*).

opens with an appearance of the risen Christ (chap. 1) and records the words of the resurrected Jesus (esp. chaps. 2–3), and a further explanation may be its affinity with the Fourth Gospel.<sup>75</sup> When Revelation is found at the end of the NT, it may have more than one function.<sup>76</sup> There is an obvious canon logic to its position at the end of the NT, preoccupied as it is with the consummation of God's purposes in human history.<sup>77</sup> As such it is the goal of the narrative trajectory of the canonical arrangement of the NT books:<sup>78</sup> the Gospels present the foundational work of Jesus Christ; Acts depicts the spread of the message about Jesus Christ through the mission of the apostles and others; the epistles instruct those in the churches planted as a result that mission; and Revelation traces salvation history through to the eschaton.

Like the books that immediately precede (e.g. Jude), Revelation may be best classified as another letter, and it picks up and develops a number of themes from the letters of Paul and others (especially the need for endurance, the danger of false teaching, and the coming of Christ). Revelation has a kinship relation to earlier NT apocalyptic passages that display similar concerns (Matthew 24 par., 2 Thessalonians 2, 2 Peter 3, Jude). In terms of its relation to other Johannine writings, it elaborates, for example, the pneumatology of the Fourth Gospel,<sup>79</sup> and the link of the Spirit and prophetic activity in 1 John (4:1–3) receives substantial development in Revelation (e.g. 1:10; 4:2; 17:3; 19:10 [“the spirit of prophecy”]; 21:10; 22:6 [“the God of the spirit of prophecy”]). We expect the book placed last in a connected series to draw together important thematic threads from the books that precede. Indeed, what is picked up (and what is not) can be taken as an indication of the things that matter most in the NT canon as a whole.

Early readers gave the book of Revelation special prominence and importance by putting it in final position in the biblical canon,<sup>80</sup> where it forms an *inclusio* with the first book of the Bible.<sup>81</sup> Genesis describes the creation of the world and the entrance of evil to spoil it, and Revelation matches Genesis by forecasting the final

<sup>75</sup> Thomas and Macchia, *Revelation*, 15 (the second suggestion is attributed to John Painter).

<sup>76</sup> For the possible functions of an ending, see Töniste, *Ending of the Canon*, 132–38. For what follows, see also Thomas and Macchia, *Revelation*, 15–16.

<sup>77</sup> Among many who make this observation, see Spellman, *Toward a Canon-Conscious Reading*, 84, 172.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 173.

<sup>79</sup> John C. Thomas, *The Spirit of the New Testament* (Leiderdorp: Deo, 2005), 157–74; Urban C. von Wahlde, “The Role of the Prophetic Spirit in John: A Struggle for Balance,” in *Prophets and Prophecy in Jewish and Early Christian Literature* (ed. Joseph Verheyden et al.; WUNT 2/286; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 211–242.

<sup>80</sup> Cf. Kent D. Clarke, “Canonical Criticism: An Integrated Reading of Biblical Texts for the Community of Faith,” in *Approaches to New Testament Study* (ed. Stanley E. Porter and David Tombs; JSNTSup 120; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 209: “[A canonical reading] places emphasis on Revelation as the concluding chapter and final summation of the entire Bible.”

<sup>81</sup> Another way of saying the same thing is that Revelation (especially its last two chapters) is the “capstone” (*Schlussstein*) of the entire Bible, see Thomas Hieke and Tobias Nicklas, “Die Worte der Prophetie dieses Buches”: *Offenbarung 22,6–21 als Schlussstein der christlichen Bibel Alten und Neuen Testaments gelesen* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 2003), 108–12.



defeat of evil and the renewal of the created order (especially Revelation 21–22).<sup>82</sup> In line with this, viewing Matt 1:1 as the title for the entire Gospel that it heads,<sup>83</sup> the introductory use of βίβλος γενέσεως (“The book of the genealogy”) sets the story of Jesus as a counterpart to another “history of origins,” the book of Genesis. If that is the intention, it signals that this book tells of the renewal of creation through the person and work of Jesus (cf. Matt 19:28 [παλιγγενεσία]). Likewise, the opening of John’s Gospel echoes Gen 1:1 (“In the beginning ...”), and so this Gospel presumably does the same thing. The story of the Bible is not, however, fully told until the book of Revelation supplies its ending. Revelation does this without ignoring either the importance of the OT or the radical newness of the Christ event, so that the prophetic author offers “a profound reinterpretation of the whole Old Testament in the light of his understanding of Jesus Christ.”<sup>84</sup>

## VII. CONCLUSIONS

My contention is that the wide distribution of the Johannine writings assists in unifying the disparate contents of the NT canon and promotes a particular reading of the NT as a whole. The Gospel of John is treated as the climax of the four portraits of Jesus provided by the Gospel Corpus. It focuses on a few highly significant miracles (“signs”) performed by Jesus and it recasts dominical teaching to accentuate the high Christology of divine sonship. Both features suit its location in fourth and final position. As well, the strategic placement of the Fourth Gospel makes it the interface between the Gospel Corpus and the rest of the NT, and as such it helps to connect the evangelists’ portrait of Christ and Paul’s teaching about Jesus as the “Son of God.” Standing at this canonical seam, John’s Gospel also paves the way for developments in Acts. The positioning of the three letters of John in the Catholic Epistles (and *Praxapostolos*) implies the harmony of the teaching of the apostles Peter and John and also their compatibility with the witness of James and Jude, the half-brothers of Jesus. Finally, Revelation is given special prominence by putting it at the end of the canon, where it is the goal of a narrative trajectory of the NT books, recapitulates key themes from preceding books, and with the book of Genesis forms an envelope around the whole Bible, bringing God’s saving purposes to a satisfying conclusion.

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<sup>82</sup> Wall, “The Apocalypse of the New Testament,” 280; cf. Tobias Nicklas, “The Apocalypse in the Framework of the Canon,” in *Revelation and the Politics of Apocalyptic Interpretation* (ed. Richard B. Hays and Stefan Alkier; Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2012), 143–53.

<sup>83</sup> Note the reasons supplied by W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison Jr., *The Gospel According to Saint Matthew, Volume 1* (ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988), 150–54.

<sup>84</sup> Brevard S. Childs, *The New Testament as Canon: An Introduction* (London: SCM, 1985), 509.