

THE PLACE OF THE BOOK OF ACTS IN READING THE NT

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Abstract: *In ancient manuscripts and early canonical lists the book of Acts is never placed next to Luke's Gospel; rather it is linked to the Gospels as a canonical block. In this way it helps to bridge Gospel and Epistle. By depicting the harmonious relations between Paul's Gentile mission and the Jewish mission of James, Peter, and John, Acts provides a context for the apostolic witness of the letters that follow. The title normally assigned to the book, the "Acts of the Apostles [plural]" suggests a similar function. Prefixing the Pauline Corpus with Acts promotes a particular reading strategy, signifying that Paul's letters, like his ministry as depicted in Acts, are directed to all believers (Gentile and Jewish) and promote their unity in a common gospel. The alternate logic of having the Catholic Epistles follow Acts is that this order draws attention to the fact that Acts features apostles other than Paul (notably Peter) and that Paul himself proclaimed the gospel to Jews as well as to Gentiles. The outcome is that Acts is an important part of the "glue" that secures the theological unity of the NT as a whole.*

Key Words: *Acts, canon, macrostructure, Pauline Corpus, Catholic Epistles, unity*

In current study of Luke-Acts, this two-part Lucan corpus is viewed by most scholars as a natural unit for the purposes of elucidating the meaning and significance of these key biblical documents.¹ There is, of course, much in favor of such an approach, for it accords with the grammatico-historical orientation of many practitioners within contemporary NT studies.² It is not, however, the only valid methodology and needs to be supplemented by the insights and perspectives provided by reception history.³ The two approaches are sometimes set at loggerheads, but there is no necessity to do so. Ancient hermeneutical practice cannot be allowed to coerce the contemporary reading of Scripture,⁴ but exegetical humility

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¹ There is, however, a vocal minority who think otherwise. For a review of recent debate over the unity of Luke-Acts, see Alan J. Bale, *Genre and Narrative Coherence in the Acts of the Apostles* (LNTS 514; London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2015), 15–20.

² E.g. R. C. Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts: A Literary Interpretation* (2 vols.; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986, 1990); J. Verheyden, ed., *The Unity of Luke-Acts* (BETL 142; Leuven: Peeters, 1999).

³ For the relative neglect of reception history in evangelical hermeneutics, see Andrew Brown, "Dead Commentators' Society: Is There a Formal Place for Reception History in Evangelical Biblical Exegesis?," *Paradosis* 1 (2014): 8–27.

⁴ For a negative assessment of the usefulness of reception history, see Joel B. Green, "Luke-Acts, or Luke and Acts: A Reaffirmation of Narrative Unity," in *Reading Acts Today: Essays in Honour of Loveday C. A. Alexander* (ed. Steve Walton et al.; LNTS 427; London: T&T Clark, 2011), 101–19. The point made by Luke Timothy Johnson is that reception history cannot prescribe what we do today; see "Literary Criticism of Luke-Acts: Is Reception History Pertinent?," *JSN* 28 (2005): 159–62.

demands that we give serious consideration to how earlier generations of believers read and interpreted the Scriptures.⁵

Part of the reception history of the book of Acts is encoded in the various extant canonical orders, for the positioning of Acts relative to other books in early codices and canonical lists provides a frame of reference for reading the book.⁶ The placing of biblical books in a particular sequence reflects the interpretive evaluations of early readers,⁷ and its preservation for posterity in canonical aggregations (e.g. Four Gospel Canon, Pauline Corpus) sets up certain expectations for future readers.⁸ Timothy J. Stone uses the phrase “compilation consciousness” to refer to the way in which books are associated with neighboring books in the canon.⁹ My presupposition is that aggregations of biblical books provide “interpretive prompts that continue to guide how these texts are faithfully used as the church’s Scripture.”¹⁰ I seek to determine what the alternative canonical positions assigned to Acts say about what early readers thought was the meaning and significance of the book.

Second, I will make an effort to ascertain what role the book of Acts plays within the overall structuring of the NT. Marcus Bockmuehl asks “whether the shape of the New Testament itself may outline an implied interpretation of its own theology,”¹¹ and he goes on to argue that “the macrostructure of the New Testament canon can be seen to give important pointers to its implied meaning as a received whole.”¹² I am attempting, therefore, to work out the implications of what

⁵ See David Paul Parris, *Reading the Bible with Giants: How 2000 Years of Biblical Interpretation Can Shed Light on Old Texts* (Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster, 2006).

⁶ For this “framing” function, see Marie Maclean, “Pretexes and Paratexts: The Art of the Peripheral,” *New Literary History* 22 (1991): 273–75; Gale L. MacLachlan and Ian Reid, *Framing and Interpretation* (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 1994), 39: “But frames are not just borderlines; as we have seen, they also have the potential to carry metamesages about how to interpret what they enclose.”

⁷ For a recent discussion of this phenomenon, see 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), 108–23, esp. 109: “Where an individual writing is positioned in relation to other writings in a collection (either materially or conceptually) has significant hermeneutical ramifications.”

⁸ Cf. Larry Hurtado, “Early Christian Manuscripts as Artifacts,” in Craig A. Evans and Daniel Zacharias, ed., *Jewish and Christian Scripture as Artifact and Canon* (Studies in Scripture in Early Judaism and Christianity 13; London: T&T Clark, 2009), 71: “The early manuscripts include instances of the physical association of certain texts with one another, and I contend that this probably reflects the view that the texts in question share some common or related subject matter or significance.”

⁹ *The Compilational History of the Megilloth: Canon, Contoured Intertextuality and Meaning in the Writings* (FAT II/59; Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 2013), 12.

¹⁰ David R. Nienhuis and Robert W. Wall, *Reading the Epistles of James, Peter, John, and Jude as Scripture: The Shaping and Shape of a Canonical Collection* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013), 13. In my view, however, Nienhuis and Wall exaggerate the providential nature of the judgments made by early Christians, when they claim that “the canonical process is one of spiritual discernment led by the Holy Spirit” (p. 12), for what they have in mind is not only the Spirit-enabled recognition of what books are Scripture (I concur with Nienhuis and Wall on that point), but also the divine superintendence of the hermeneutical evaluations behind the actual ordering of the biblical books in the canon.

¹¹ Marcus Bockmuehl, *Seeing the Word: Refocusing NT Study* (Studies in Theological Interpretation; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 103.

¹² Bockmuehl, *Seeing the Word*, 109.

Robert W. Wall calls the “canon logic” reflected in the arrangement of the constituent parts of the NT.¹³ I seek to show that the book of Acts in its various canonical positions has a particularly significant role within the structure of the NT, for it serves to demonstrate the compatibility of the diverse writings that make up the NT canon.¹⁴

I. ACTS WITHOUT LUKE

In patristic lists or discussions the Gospels are found in various orders,¹⁵ but the sequence with which we are familiar in printed Bibles is what predominated in Greek manuscripts. Irenaeus (c. AD 180) treated the common order of Matthew-Mark-Luke-John as the chronological order of composition,¹⁶ but this may be no more than a supposition on his part, and it is possible to suggest other rationales for the arrangement.¹⁷ His discussion of the Gospels in response to the Gnostic and Marcionite threats also made use of other orders (notably Matthew-Luke-Mark-John).¹⁸ The point that is particularly relevant to the present study is the fact that Luke is not put next to Acts in any extant old manuscript.¹⁹ In the so-called “Western order” (e.g. Codex Bezae [D 05] and \mathfrak{P}^{45}), the Gospels attributed to the two apostles (Matthew and John) precede those connected to the companions of the apostles (Luke and Mark), but still the opportunity is not taken to place Luke’s Gospel next to Acts. If canonical placement is reflective of the evaluations of ancient readers, then the positions assigned to Luke reflect the view of these readers that the primary canonical conversation partners of Luke are the other three Gospels, not its companion volume, Acts. The alternative of conjoining Luke and Acts “as one unit in a mutually interpretive two-part treatise” was not taken up in antiquity,²⁰ and their lack of physical contiguity in canonical arrangements can be read as

¹³ “The Acts of the Apostles,” in *NIB* 10:26–27.

¹⁴ Cf. the conclusion drawn by Brevard S. Childs, *The Church’s Guide for Reading Paul: The Canonical Shaping of the Pauline Corpus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 231.

¹⁵ See John Barton, *Holy Writings, Sacred Text: The Canon in Early Christianity* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1997), 149; Bruce M. Metzger, *The Canon of the NT: Its Origin, Development, and Significance* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), 296–97, and the inventory of twelve different sequences provided in Pierre-Maurice Bogaert, “Ordres anciens des évangiles et tétraévangile en un seul codex,” *RIL* 30 (1999): 297–314.

¹⁶ *Haer.* 3.1.1.

¹⁷ For a non-chronological explanation of the common order, see Greg Goswell, “The Order of the Books in the NT,” *JETS* 53 (2010): 228–30.

¹⁸ See *Haer.* 3.1.1; 3.9–11; 3.11.7; 4.6.1.

¹⁹ Bogaert, “Ordres anciens,” 299–301, 304–5; Metzger, *Canon of the NT*, 230, 231, 296, 297.

²⁰ Michael F. Bird, “The Unity of Luke-Acts in Recent Discussion,” *JSNT* 29 (2007): 440. See Graham N. Stanton’s discussion of separate placements of Luke and Acts in “The Fourfold Gospel,” *NTS* 43 (1997): 334–35; cf. C. Kavin Rowe, “History, Hermeneutics, and the Unity of Luke-Acts,” *JSNT* 28 (2005): 131–57; Marcus Bockmuehl, “Why Not Let Acts Be Acts? In Conversation with C. Kavin Rowe,” *JSNT* 28 (2005): 163–66; Mikel C. Parsons and Richard I. Pervo, *Rethinking the Unity of Luke and Acts* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993); Richard I. Pervo, “Fourteen Years After: Revisiting *Rethinking the Unity of Luke and Acts*,” in Andrew Gregory and C. Kavin Rowe, ed., *Rethinking the Unity and Reception of Luke and Acts* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2010), 23–40; François Bovon, “The Re-

a statement about the differing contexts in which each volume should be read.²¹ The focus of the present study is the book of Acts, not the Gospel of Luke, and attention will be directed at evaluating the differing canonical positions assigned to Acts and their implications for meaning.

II. ACTS AS THE FIFTH GOSPEL

Acts is first found in the Greek manuscript tradition in the third century in codices as a narrational supplement to the Four Gospels (P⁴⁵, P⁵³),²² picking up as it does the storyline from where the Gospels leave off.²³ Acts resembles the Gospel genre, taking the form of a “biographical monograph” that traces the lives of several key characters.²⁴ Acts 1:1 briefly resumes the prologue of Luke’s Gospel (Luke 1:1–4), specifically mentioning the earlier volume dedicated to Theophilus (“In the first book, O Theophilus, ...”), so that the prologue applies to both parts, but instead of providing the biography of one person (Jesus), Acts describes what Jesus *continues* to do by broadening its scope to present key episodes in the lives of several early church figures, especially Peter and Paul. Peter plays a leading role in the four Gospels, and the Gospel of Luke is no exception (e.g. Luke 5:1–11; 8:45; 9:20, 32; 12:41). The disciples in Acts frequently mimic some facet of Jesus’s life as described in Luke, for example, teaching in the temple courts (Acts 3; cf. Luke 19:47–48; 22:23–38), being in conflict with religious authorities (Acts 4:1–8:3; cf. Luke 5:29–6:11) and performing healings (Acts 9:32–35; cf. Luke 5:17–26). Jesus’s journey to Jerusalem finds a parallel in Paul’s to Jerusalem and Rome, and in each case the commencement of the journey is a major turning point in the narrative (Acts 19:21; cf. Luke 9:51).²⁵ The listed similarities, along with many others that might be mentioned, promote recognition of Acts in the character of a “Fifth Gospel.”

ception of the Book of Acts in Late Antiquity,” in *Contemporary Studies in Acts*, 66–92 (covering the second to sixth centuries).

²¹ 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), 2–5, 352; idem, “Irenaeus and the Reception of Acts in the Second Century,” in *Contemporary Studies in Acts* (ed. Thomas E. Phillips; Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2009), 47–65.

²² There is, however, Uncial 0189, a leaf from a vellum codex starting with Acts (given the pages are numbered 15 and 16). See Philip W. Comfort, *Early Manuscripts and Modern Translations of the NT* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1990), 72; Philip W. Comfort and David P. Barrett, ed., *The Complete Text of the Earliest NT Manuscripts* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 642–45.

²³ *The Greek NT* (4th rev. ed.; ed. Barbara Aland et al; Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft/United Bible Societies, 2001) (= UBS⁴), 8*; Richard Pervo, *Acts: A Commentary* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2009), 1; Schröter, “Die Apostelgeschichte,” 407, 408.

²⁴ Burrige, *What Are the Gospels?*, 236–39, 275–79; idem, *Imitating Jesus: An Inclusive Approach to NT Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 228–29; for more details, see idem, “The Genre of Acts—Revisited,” in *Reading Acts Today*, 3–28.

²⁵ 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

As well, each Gospel ends with mission sayings that help to prepare for the spread of the gospel described in Acts (Matt 28:16–20; Mark 16:9–20;²⁶ Luke 24:44–49; John 21). On that basis, Acts can be viewed as a continuation of any of the four Gospels—not just of Luke. Even if Mark’s Gospel is read in the form that ends at 16:8 (the Shorter Ending), the predicted reunion of the disciples with the risen Christ in Galilee in the final chapter can be taken as alluding to a future Gentile mission (Mark 16:7; cf. 11:17; 13:10; 14:9, 28),²⁷ given the Galilean location of the dominical mission sayings in Matthew 28 and John 21 and the association of that region with foreigners (Matt 4:15: “Galilee of the Gentiles”; cf. 1 Macc 5:15).²⁸ The dominical mission saying in Acts 1:8 is quickly followed by use of the “Men of Galilee” address in 1:11, for one essential qualification of the apostles as witnesses to the resurrection is that they had known Jesus since the earliest days of his ministry in Galilee (1:22; 13:31). The majority scholarly view is that the Longer Ending of Mark (16:9–20) is a pastiche of materials gathered from the other three Gospels (e.g. Jesus’s appearance to Mary [Mark 16:12; cf. Luke 8:2; John 20:11–18]).²⁹ James A. Kelhoffer argues that these verses are from the early decades of the second century and presuppose a Four Gospel collection.³⁰ The verses also indicate that the Gospels as a grouping were read in conjunction with Acts,³¹ for there are a number of thematic links between the Longer Ending and the book of Acts.³² Likely examples are the pairing of believing and being baptized (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; 16:31, 33), exorcisms (Mark 16:17; Acts 8:7; 16:18), signs attesting the gospel messengers (Mark 16:17, 20; Acts 2:43; 4:16), speaking in tongues (Mark 16:17; Acts 19:6), protection from snakebite (Mark 16:18; Acts 28:3–6),³³ worldwide mission (Mark 16:15; Acts 1:8), the ascension (Mark 16:19; Acts 1:9–11), and the presence of Christ at God’s right hand (Mark 16:19; Acts 2:33; 5:31; 7:55).

Press, 1984), 23–39; Charles H. Talbert, *Literary Patterns, Theological Themes, and the Genre of Luke-Acts* (SBLMS 20; Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1974), 1–50.

²⁶ For a maximalist view of the text of Mark’s Gospel, see William R. Farmer, *The Last Twelve Verses of Mark* (SNTSMS 25; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974); Nicholas P. Lunn, *The Original Ending of Mark: A New Case for the Authenticity of Mark 16:9–20* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2014); also David C. Parker, *The Living Text of the Gospels* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 124–47, esp. 147: “We are therefore not in a position to say that the Longer Ending can be forgotten. The fact is that it stands as the ending which has been dominant for the reading of Mark for most of the text’s history.”

²⁷ M. Eugene Boring, *Mark: A Commentary* (NTL; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2006), 447, 448.

²⁸ The population of the region was, however, predominantly Jewish, see Bradley W. Root, *First Century Galilee: A Fresh Examination of the Sources* (WUNT 2/374; Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 2014), 146–50. Jesus’s few recorded encounters with Gentiles are, however, situated in his Galilean ministry (e.g. Matt 8:5–13; John 4:46–54).

²⁹ For another view, see David W. Hester, *Does Mark 16:9–20 Belong in the NT?* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2015), 135–38.

³⁰ *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.

³¹ Kelhoffer, *Miracle and Mission*, 146, 147.

³² Lunn argues that Mark 16:9–20 served as a source upon which Luke drew in writing Acts, with Peter’s speeches in Acts 2, 5 and 10 being prominent examples (*Original Ending of Mark*, 291–96).

³³ Kelhoffer disputes this particular connection (*Miracle and Mission*, 402–4).

The rehabilitation of Peter (John 21:15–17) and the extensive teaching about the Spirit’s post-Easter role in John’s Gospel (chaps. 14–16; esp. Acts 1:8 and John 15:26–27 that link Spirit endowment and apostolic witness), according to Wall, “signify the important role that John’s Gospel performs in preparing the reader for the story of Acts,”³⁴ so that the connection of Acts to the preceding ministry of Jesus is by no means limited to thematic links with Luke’s Gospel. The upshot of all this is that it is possible to argue that in terms of canonical relations Acts is linked to the Gospels as a canonical block rather than with Luke in particular.³⁵

III. THE TITLE OF ACTS

Despite the precedent provided by the Greek Bible in which the books of Samuel and Kings are placed under the titles Kingdoms I–IV, the multiple links between Luke and Acts (e.g. their common addressee) were not highlighted by means of assigned titles (*Ad Theophilum I* and *Ad Theophilum II*),³⁶ and so titology supports the supposition that Luke and Acts lived separate lives in the early church. Presumably for the author of Luke’s Gospel, his second volume comes under the designation of a “narrative” (διήγησις, Luke 1:1) given in the prologue of his first volume, and the way in which Acts 1:1 connects this second volume with the first as a sequel implies the same. “The Acts of the Apostles” did not receive that title until the latter part of the second century and is first attested in the Anti-Marcionite Prologue to Luke (*apostolicis actibus*).³⁷ The title provides a clue as to how some second-century readers understood the book of Acts. The intention behind the title may be to argue that Paul was not the only faithful apostle of Christ, even if more is said about him than about others in Acts,³⁸ but this is no evidence that Acts was

³⁴ Wall, “Acts of the Apostles,” 30; cf. 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), 170–72; 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), 201–15; idem, “The Kinship of John and Acts,” in *Christianity, Judaism, and Other Greco-Roman Cults: Studies for Morton Smith at Sixty*, vol. 1: NT (ed. Jacob Neusner; Leiden: Brill, 1975), 187–205. For the possible theological significance of the John-Acts collation, see Matthew Yates Emerson, *Christ and the New Creation: A Canonical Approach to the Theology of the NT* (Ph.D. diss., Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2011), 90–93. Emerson argues that the new creation typology of John’s Gospel (such as highlighted by Andreas J. Köstenberger, *A Theology of John’s Gospel and Letters: The Word, the Christ, the Son of God* [Biblical Theology of the NT; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009], chap. 8) is picked up in Acts, which shows the beginning of the restoration of creation through the gospel mission.

³⁵ Mikeal C. Parsons comes to substantially the same conclusion, see “Hearing Acts as a Sequel to a Multiform Gospel: Historical and Hermeneutical Reflections on Acts, Luke, and the ΠΟΛΛΟΙ,” in *Rethinking the Unity and Reception*, 128–52, esp. 128–29, 134–35, 142. Parsons’s own thesis is that Luke’s intent and later reception of Acts are actually closer than usually supposed.

³⁶ As noted by Henry J. Cadbury, *The Making of Luke-Acts* (New York: Macmillan, 1927), 10, 11.

³⁷ Jürgen Regul, *Die antimarcionistischen Evangelienprologe* (Aus der Geschichte der lateinischen Bibel 6; Freiburg: Herder, 1969), 45.

³⁸ F. F. Bruce, *Commentary on the Book of the Acts* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1954), 17.

composed in the second century as a reaction against Marcionite Christianity.³⁹ The name “Acts of the Apostles” (πράξεις [τῶν] ἀποστόλων), or just “Acts” (πράξεις),⁴⁰ is attested since the time of Clement of Alexandria (*Strom.* 5.12) and Irenaeus (*Haer.* 3.13.3).⁴¹ Irenaeus can also refer to the contents of Acts as *de actibus et doctrina apostolorum* (“concerning the acts and teaching of the apostles”) (*Haer.* 3.15.1).⁴² The Muratorian Fragment (line 34), consistent with its anti-Marcionite stance, calls it *acta omnium apostolorum* (“the acts of all the apostles”),⁴³ on the basis that Paul was not the only accredited apostle, but Zahn suggests that the title draws a contrast with the various apocryphal books of apostolic deeds that feature only one apostolic individual. Cyril of Jerusalem calls it πράξεις δώδεκα τῶν ἀποστόλων (“the Acts of the Twelve Apostles”).⁴⁴

According to W. G. Kümmel,⁴⁵ the title “The Acts of the Apostles” does not fit the contents of the book, for the apostles are not the main characters of the book. All the apostles are named in the opening chapter (1:13), and there is the expressed concern to make up the number of the Twelve after the death of Judas (1:15–26). Peter, James, and John are featured up to the Jerusalem Conference in Acts 15 (a major turning point in the book), and Paul is especially prominent from chapter 9 onwards, but the other apostles as individuals receive no attention. Stephen and Philip are not apostles but still play a strategic role in preparing for the Gentile mission (Acts 6–8). The apostles as a group fade out of prominence (some of the last references being 9:27; 11:1; 15:2, 4, 22, 23). Peter is their usual spokesman, and the others have no individual voice. Barnabas and Paul are twice labelled “apostles” (14:4, 14), but this merely amounts to calling them church representatives.⁴⁶ Whatever the exact purpose of Acts, it must relate to the imposing presence of Paul (especially in Acts 13–28).

Further, as noted by David Trobisch,⁴⁷ the title “Acts” does not conform well to the ancient literary genre described as “Acts” (πράξεις), for typically the mighty deeds of only one hero are narrated, not those of several heroes, and the noble death of the figure is narrated. On that count, apocryphal books such as *Acts of John*,

³⁹ Pace Joseph B. Tyson, “Acts and the Apostles: Issues of Leadership in the Second Century,” in Rubén R. Dupertuis and Todd C. Penner, eds., *Engaging Early Christian History: Reading Acts in the Second Century* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 45–58.

⁴⁰ See NTG²⁷ 320, 735 for details.

⁴¹ Henry J. Cadbury, “The Tradition,” in Frederick J. Foakes Jackson and Kirsopp Lake, eds., *The Beginnings of Christianity. Part 1: The Acts of the Apostles* (5 vols; New York: Macmillan, 1920–1933), 2.220.

⁴² As noted by Christopher Mount, *Pauline Christianity: Luke-Acts and the Legacy of Paul* (NovTSup 104; Leiden: Brill, 2002), 42.

⁴³ The Latin text is provided by Theodor von Zahn, *Grundriss der Geschichte des neutestamentlichen Kanons: Eine Ergänzung zu der Einleitung in das Neue Testament* (Leipzig: A. Deichert, 1904), 78; idem, *Geschichte des neutestamentlichen Kanons* (2 vols.; Erlangen: A. Deichert, 1888–92), 2:1.52.

⁴⁴ *Catech.* 4.36; see John Henry Parker, trans., *The Catechetical Lectures of S. Cyril, Archbishop of Jerusalem* (Oxford: F. & J. Rivington, 1845), 50, 51.

⁴⁵ *Introduction to the NT* (trans. Howard Clark Kee; rev. ed.; London: SCM, 1975), 159 n. 149.

⁴⁶ In 14:14 the order of the names is “the apostles Barnabas and Paul,” which can perhaps be taken as support for the interpretation suggested. For the issue of Paul’s apostolic status in Acts, see Bale, *Genre and Narrative Coherence*, 154–82.

⁴⁷ *The First Edition of the NT* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 39.

Acts of Peter, Acts of Andrew, better conform to the genre.⁴⁸ The narrative of Acts closes before the martyrdom of Paul, though Luke knew of it (given the predictions in Acts 20:23 and 21:11). The generic title turns the book into a celebration of apostolic achievements.⁴⁹ In tension with such an orientation, the summaries scattered through Acts suggest that it records the spread of *the word* to the seat of empire, Rome (e.g. 6:7; 9:31; 12:24); however, God uses different human agents to bring this about. On the other hand, it should be noted that the reference in the title to “apostles” (plural) prepares for the letters attributed to various apostles (Paul, Peter, John) that follow in the canonical ordering of the NT materials.

The opening verses of Acts (1:1–2) summarize the scope and thrust of Luke’s Gospel as “all that Jesus began (ἤρξατο) both to do and to teach” and suggest (allowing the auxiliary verb its full force) that this second volume recounts what Jesus *continued* to do and teach through his Spirit-empowered witnesses.⁵⁰ Such a view of the book is supported by references to the activity of the risen Christ in its pages (e.g. 9:5; 16:7; 22:18; 23:11) as well as by the Christ-like character and actions of a number of its leading participants (e.g. Stephen, Philip, Peter, Paul).⁵¹ The common title of the book fails to reflect this aspect, so that a modification such as “The Acts of [Jesus Christ through] the Apostles” might be suggested, or even “The Acts of the Holy Spirit,” if it is kept in mind that he is called “the Spirit of Jesus” (16:6, 7) and that he works mainly through Spirit-empowered messengers. Finally, Bockmuehl suggests the possibility of naming it the “Acts of the Two Apostles,”⁵² given the fact that Peter plays a leading role in the first half of Acts (chaps. 1–12) and Paul is center stage in the second half (chaps. 13–28). It was probably the two quite different halves of Acts, the one featuring Peter and the other focused on Paul, that explain the two canonical settings assigned to the book, which I will now go on to explain and evaluate.

IV. ACTS AND THE PAULINE CORPUS

In the English Bible, the Pauline Corpus is prefaced by the book of the Acts, and this canonical position suggests that those responsible viewed Acts as function-

⁴⁸ See E. Hennecke and W. Schneemelcher, *NT Apocrypha* (ed. R. McL. Wilson; 2 vols.; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1964), 2:188–531.

⁴⁹ With regard to the effect of the commonly assigned title of Acts on the reading process, Robert W. Wall states: “the effect of recognizing the superscription of Acts as a canonical property is to call attention to a new set of orientating concerns for readers of Acts as Scripture” (“Acts of the Apostles,” 29).

⁵⁰ See C. K. Barrett, *The Acts of the Apostles*, vol. 1 (ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994), 66–67. The phraseology at the end of John’s Gospel (21:25: “many other things that Jesus did” (ἄλλα πολλὰ ἃ ἐποίησεν ὁ Ἰησοῦς) may be compared to Acts 1:1 (ἤρξατο ὁ Ἰησοῦς ποιῆν).

⁵¹ E.g. David P. Moessner, “The Christ Must Suffer: New Light on the Jesus-Peter, Stephen, Paul Parallels in Luke-Acts,” *NovT* 28 (1986): 220–56; A. J. Mattill Jr., “The Jesus-Paul Parallels and the Purpose of Luke-Acts,” *NovT* 17 (1975): 15–46.

⁵² Bockmuehl, *Seeing the Word*, 130.

ing as a bridge between the Gospels and the Letters.⁵³ In the Muratorian Fragment (c. AD 200),⁵⁴ “the acts of all the apostles” is discussed after Luke and John and before the Pauline Epistles. So too in Eusebius, the order of discussion of the *homologoumena* (acknowledged or recognized writings) is: the Gospels, Acts, Pauline Epistles, 1 John, 1 Peter, and Revelation; namely, he lists the letters of Paul after Acts.⁵⁵ In the Vulgate (determining the order within the Western Bible, Protestant and Catholic), Acts is placed between the Gospels and the Pauline Epistles.⁵⁶ Though this way of ordering the books ignores the sequence in the narrative of Acts (where Peter precedes Paul), with Acts strategically placed before the *corpus Paulinum*, the churches planted or visited by Paul in Acts receive letters from the apostle in the adjoining epistolary section of the canon. The only exception is Colossians, for this church was not founded by Paul (Col 2:1), nor is there any record that he visited Colossae. This canonical arrangement testifies to the belief that the Paul of Acts is the same Paul who wrote the letters, and the Lukan portrait of Paul (*Paulusbild*) need not be viewed as revisionist nor as merely reflecting how a later generation viewed him long after his death (as part of the *Wirkungsgeschichte* of the Pauline heritage).⁵⁷ Though Acts fails to mention that Paul wrote letters, various scholars have recently argued that Pauline letters were used by the author of Acts as one of the sources upon which he drew for his own composition, and this view is now widely accepted.⁵⁸

⁵³ Brevard S. Childs, *The NT as Canon: An Introduction* (London: SCM, 1984), 219–25; cf. Robert W. Wall, “The Acts of the Apostles in Canonical Context,” *BTB* 18 (1988): 17, 18; idem, “Acts of the Apostles,” 26–32, 389–91. Wall builds on the work of Childs. 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 for ignoring the patristic evidence. Smith favors the wider thesis that Acts is the “glue” that holds *all* the pieces of the NT together (see below).

⁵⁴ Eckhard J. Schnabel, “The Muratorian Fragment: The State of Research,” *JETS* 57 (2014): 231–64.

⁵⁵ *Hist. eccl.* 3.25.1–2.

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

⁵⁷ Pace Philipp Vielhauer, “On the ‘Paulinism’ of Acts,” in *Studies in Luke-Acts* (ed. Leander E. Keck and J. Louis Martyn; Nashville: Abingdon, 1966), 33–50; and E. Haenchen, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Commentary* (trans. B. Noble et al; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1971), 112–16; for a review and defense of the authenticity of the portrait of Paul in Acts, see Stanley E. Porter, *The Paul of Acts: Essays in Literary Criticism, Rhetoric, and Theology* (WUNT 115; Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1999), 187–206.

⁵⁸ See Morton S. Enslin, “Once Again, Luke and Paul,” *ZNW* 61 (1970): 253–71; 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. Richard P. Thompson and Thomas E. Phillips; Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1998), 77–86 (arguing for the dependence of Acts 15:7–11 on Galatians 2); Richard Pervo, *Dating Acts: Between the Evangelists and the Apologists* (Santa Rosa, CA: Polebridge, 2006), 51–147 (p. 145: “The cumulative evidence that Luke made use of Pauline letters is rather persuasive”).

In providing a preface to the Pauline Corpus, Acts prompts the reading of the letters from a certain perspective.⁵⁹ Acts highlights Paul's efforts to promote peace and unity among believers, especially between Jewish and Gentile believers. Indeed, the unity of the church is a pervasive theme in Acts, and the promotion of unity among believers would seem to be one of the main purposes for which Acts was written,⁶⁰ and the juxtaposed Pauline Corpus is to be read with this in mind. In the light of passages such as Romans 9–11, 14–15, 1 Corinthians 1–2, Ephesians 2, and Philippians, this does not need to be viewed as a tendentious reading of Paul's literary legacy.⁶¹ Paul the missionary in Acts routinely starts by preaching in the synagogue (if there is one in the location) until expelled (9:20–22; 13:5, 14–52; 14:1; 16:13; 17:1–4, 10–12, 17; 18:4, 19; 19:8–10; 28:17). Paul does this as a matter of theological principle (NB Acts 13:46: “It was necessary [ἦν ἀναγκαῖον] that the word of God should be spoken first to you [= the Jews], ... we turn to the Gentiles”), and the priority of the Jews in the divine plan of salvation and their temporary rejection of the gospel as grounds for a mission to the Gentiles are also stated in his letters (Rom 1:16; 2:9–10; 11:11–15, 19–20; 15:8, 9). The Paul of Acts, who still identifies himself as a Pharisee,⁶² can also be found in his letters (Acts 23:6; 26:5; cf. Gal 2:15; 1 Cor 9:20; 2 Cor 11:22; Phil 3:4, 5; Rom 11:1–5; 1 Tim 1:3). There is, then, no formal contradiction between Acts and the Pauline Corpus, though Jervell is right when he says that “elements lying in the shadows of Paul's letters [are] placed in the sun by Luke.”⁶³

There are parallels between the activities of Peter and Paul as recorded in Acts, for example the healing of a lame man (3:1–10; 14:8–10), and they both have missions to Gentiles (chaps. 10–11; chaps. 13–21).⁶⁴ The drawing of such parallels appears to be with the aim of showing that they work in tandem rather than at cross-purposes. Peter makes his own contribution to the unity of the two arms of mission, by resisting pressure to impose circumcision of Gentile converts, with the narration of the Cornelius episode and its gospel implications given a threefold repetition (10:1–48; 11:1–18; 15:7–9). It is important to note that Paul's correction

⁵⁹ Cf. Wall, “The Acts of the Apostles,” 31: “Acts provides an angle of vision into the Pauline and Catholic epistolary collections that follow.”

⁶⁰ Cf. Andrew C. Clark, *Parallel Lives: The Relation of Paul to the Apostles in the Lukan 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.” See esp. 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).

⁶¹ Jacob Jervell, *The Unknown Paul: Essays on Luke-Acts and Early Christian History* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984), 68–76 (75: “We are ... in Romans 9–11 confronted with that part of Paul which above all is the basis and foundation of the Lukan Paul”). For this paragraph, I acknowledge my substantial dependence on Jervell.

⁶² For Paul's Pharisaism in Acts, see Mary Marshall, *The Portrayal of the Pharisees in the Gospels and Acts* (FRLANT 254; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2015), 147–49, 158–59; Joseph B. Tyson, *Images of Judaism in Luke-Acts* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1992), 166, 167; idem, *Marcion and Luke-Acts: A Defining Struggle* (Columbia: University of South Carolina, 2006), 74–76.

⁶³ Jervell, *Unknown Paul*, 73 (addition mine).

⁶⁴ David Spell, *Peter and Paul in Acts: A Comparison of Their Ministries* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2006); Clark, *Parallel Lives*, 35–38, 324–25.

of Peter in Galatians 2 is on the basis of their *shared* conviction that justification is not by works of the law (2:16: “knowing that...” [εἰδότες ὅτι]), so that Paul does not rebuke Peter for having faulty doctrine, but for acting in a way that is inconsistent with the gospel of justification by faith, about which they share a common understanding.⁶⁵ As well, given the two earlier recorded meetings between Paul and Peter that demonstrate Paul’s independence and the agreement of the two apostles (cf. Gal 1:18–24; 2:1–10), the narrative about the Antioch incident implies that Peter accepted the rebuke handed out by Paul.⁶⁶ At the heart of Acts is the council at Jerusalem (Acts 15:1–21) where the danger of discord between the Pauline mission and the Jerusalem apostles is averted.⁶⁷ In that passage Peter and James are portrayed as supporting Paul and enunciating the common gospel that they proclaimed to both Jew and Gentile (15:9–11).⁶⁸ Next, Paul’s sensitivity to Jewish convictions about the law (“because of the Jews that were in those places”) leads him to take the step of circumcising Timothy, so as to remove any barrier to mission work among Jews (16:1–5).⁶⁹ Timothy “stands as a symbol of Paul’s missiological intent in Acts, which is to found Christian congregations in the Diaspora with a mixture of Jewish and Gentile converts whose faith and practices are deeply rooted in the church’s Jewish legacy.”⁷⁰ Later in Acts, James and other Jerusalemite elders glorify God on hearing what God has done through Paul’s Gentile mission, and, in turn, Paul acts on the advice of James in an effort to ensure mutual understanding and good relations with Jewish believers (Acts 21:17–26).⁷¹ In other words, prefixing the Pauline Corpus with Acts promotes a particular reading strategy for his letters, namely that these writings, like Paul’s own ministry as depicted in Acts, are directed to all believers (Gentile and Jewish) and promote their unity in a common gospel.

V. ACTS AND THE CATHOLIC EPISTLES

In contrast to the order customary in English Bibles, in all Greek textual witnesses Acts prefaces the Catholic Letters and these are treated as a fixed and coher-

⁶⁵ Thomas Söding, “Justification and Participation: Ecumenical Dimensions of Galatians,” in *Galatians and Christian Theology: Justification, the Gospel, and Ethics in Paul’s Letter* (ed. Mark W. Elliott et al.; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014), 67.

⁶⁶ On the supposed rivalry of Peter and Paul, see Bockmuehl’s survey of the legacy of F. C. Baur and the Tübingen School on NT scholarship (*Seeing the Word*, 121–36). This tradition of interpretation continues, for example, in David Trobisch, “The Book of Acts as a Narrative Commentary on the Letters of the NT: A Programmatic Essay,” in *Rethinking the Unity and Reception*, 119–27.

⁶⁷ See the discussion of Trobisch, *First Edition of the NT*, 82, 83.

⁶⁸ Josef Pichler notes the theological similarity between Acts 15:9–11, 13:38–39, and Gal 2:16; see “Das theologische Anliegen der Paulusrezeption im lukanischen Werk,” in Verheyden, ed., *Unity of Luke-Acts*, 738.

⁶⁹ For the historical credibility of this incident, see David Wenham, “Acts and the Pauline Corpus,” in *The Book of Acts in Its First Century Setting*, vol. 1: *Ancient Literary Setting* (ed. Bruce W. Winter and Andrew D. Clarke; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 254–55; Alan J. Thompson, *The Acts of the Risen Lord Jesus: Luke’s Account of God’s Unfolding Plan* (NSBT 27; Nottingham, UK: Apollon, 2011), 188, 189.

⁷⁰ Nienhuis and Wall, *Reading the Epistles*, 67.

⁷¹ Thompson, *One Lord, One People*, 161, 162.

ent canonical unit (*Praxapostolos*).⁷² Cyril of Jerusalem discusses the biblical books that are to be received in the order: “the Acts of the twelve apostles”; “the seven Catholic Epistles”; and finally “the fourteen epistles of Paul.”⁷³ Athanasius advocates the recognition of the “Acts of the Apostles and seven letters, called Catholic, by the Apostles.”⁷⁴ Likewise, Jerome lists the canonical books in the order: Gospels, Paul’s Epistles, Acts, Catholic Epistles, and Revelation.⁷⁵ Wall argues that the decisive role played by James at the conference in Acts 15 (James has the last say, and his judgment is decisive) best explains the placement of the Letter of James as the “frontispiece” of the Catholic Epistles.⁷⁶ The apostles and the family of Jesus are together in the upper room in the opening chapter of Acts (1:14), and Jesus’s family, especially James and Jude, remained influential in the Jewish church in Palestine. The letters of James and Jude bookend the Catholic Epistles, with their fraternal link highlighted by the self-reference in the first verse of Jude (“Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ and brother of James”; cf. Jas 1:1). The mission activities of Peter and John in Palestine (but not elsewhere) receive brief mention in Acts 8:14–25 and 9:32–11:18. There is no record of James venturing beyond Jerusalem,⁷⁷ but he was the center of a wider network of influence and contacts in the Diaspora (cf. Gal 2:12: “certain men from James”). The letters connected to the three “pillars” are directed to the Jewish-Christian Diaspora. This is explicit in the addressees in Jas 1:1 and 1 Pet 1:1. The provenance of the Johannine letters in the Jewish Diaspora (cf. John 7:35; 12:20) and the Palestinian Jewish origin (and destination) of 2 Peter and Jude are also likely.⁷⁸

In Vaticanus (B 03) and Alexandrinus (A 02) Acts stands between the four Gospels and the Catholic Epistles, with the Pauline Epistles placed after that, but in

⁷² See the listing provided in UBS⁴, 6*–18*; David C. Parker, *An Introduction to the NT Manuscripts and their Texts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 283–86. In Codex Alexandrinus at the end of the letter of Jude the colophon treats Acts and the Catholic Epistles as a unit (πραξεις των αγλων αποστολων και καθολικαι) (folio 84 verso), found at http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/Viewer.aspx?ref=royal_ms_1_d_viii_fs001r.

⁷³ *Catech.* 4.36.

⁷⁴ *Ep.* 39 (c. AD 367). The Greek text is provided by Zahn, *Grundriss der Geschichte des neutestamentlichen Kanons*, 88.

⁷⁵ *Ep.* 53.8 (Migne PL 22.547).

⁷⁶ “A Unifying Theology of the Catholic Epistles: A Canonical Approach,” in *The Catholic Epistles and the Tradition* (BETL 176; ed. J. Schlosser; Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2004), 44–55; idem, “The Priority of James,” in Karl-Wilhelm Niebuhr and Robert W. Wall, eds., *The Catholic Epistles and Apostolic Tradition* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2009), 153–60; Nienhuis and Wall, *Reading the Epistles*, 49–52; cf. Gal 2:9 where the “pillars” (στυλοι) are listed in the same order as their letters (Dieter Lührmann, “Gal 2,9 und die katholischen Breife: Bemerkungen zum Kanon und zur regula fidei,” ZNW 72 [1981]: 71).

⁷⁷ Paul’s reference to “the brothers of the Lord” as travelling missionaries (1 Cor 9:5) probably does not include James; see Richard Bauckham, *Jude and the Relatives of Jesus in the Early Church* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1990), 57–60.

⁷⁸ Judith M. Lieu, *The Theology of the Johannine Epistles* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 16–21; John A. T. Robinson, “The Destination and Purpose of the Johannine Epistles,” in *Twelve NT Studies* (London: SCM, 1962), 126–38; Anders Gerdmar, *Rethinking the Judaism-Hellenism Dichotomy: A Historiographical Study of Second Peter and Jude* (ConBib NT Series 36; Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 2001).

Sinaiticus (Ⲙ 01) the order is Gospels, Pauline Epistles, Acts, and Catholic Epistles. Codex Bezae is a fifth-century bilingual manuscript, with Greek text on the left-hand page and Latin on the right-hand page. It contains the four Gospels in the Western order followed by most of the Acts of the Apostles. The damaged codex has one folio (415 recto) with a Latin text of 3 John 11b–15 (between the Gospels and Acts).⁷⁹ As stated by Wall, the manuscript tradition indicates that “Acts found its significance as the context for understanding the non-Pauline apostolic witness.”⁸⁰ This settled pattern of conjoining of Acts and the Catholic Epistles (usually in that order) suggests that these letters are to be viewed “through the lens of Acts.”⁸¹

The positioning of the Catholic Epistles after Acts may imply that Acts promotes non-Pauline forms of Christianity and, in fact, the book of Acts depicts Paul himself as their chief promoter. A recurring motif in the series of apologetic speeches by Paul in the latter portion of Acts is his loyalty to his ancestral faith in the God who raises the dead,⁸² with the preaching of Jesus’s resurrection as the center of his gospel (e.g. 22:3, 12; 23:6; 24:14–15; 26:4–8, 22, 27; 28:17, 20),⁸³ so that Paul can be viewed as approving the message addressed to Diaspora Jewish believers in the Catholic Epistles as applicable to all believers, since their teaching is fundamentally in line with his own. In this regard, note the resurrection basis of the paraenesis in 1 Peter (esp. 1:3, 21; 3:21; cf. the speeches of Peter in Acts 2:22–36; 3:12–26; 4:8–12), and, according to Matthew Jensen, 1 John was written to affirm the resurrection of the incarnate Jesus (e.g. the claim to have seen and handled the risen Christ in 1 John 1:1; cf. John 20:24–29).⁸⁴ Recently, Nienhuis and Wall have argued that the Catholic Epistles have the role of preventing (and correcting) an antinomian misreading of Pauline theology (esp. the argument against a false type of *sola fideism* in James 2), so that the Catholic Epistles function like the Pastoral Epistles in guiding the reading of the Pauline Corpus.⁸⁵ However, the polemical

⁷⁹ The book of Acts begins on the reverse side of the same leaf (415 verso). The bottom half of 415 recto contains the Latin explicit of 3 John (*Epistulae Iohannis III*) and the incipit of Acts (*Actus Apostolorum*); found at <http://cudl.lib.cam.ac.uk/view/MS-NN-00002-00041/678>.

⁸⁰ Robert W. Wall, “Acts of the Apostles in Canonical Context,” 20.

⁸¹ Nienhuis and Wall, *Reading the Epistles*, 53.

⁸² Klaus Haacker, “Das Bekenntnis des Paulus zur Hoffnung Israels nach der Apostelgeschichte des Lukas,” *NTS* 31 (1985): 437–51; Marshall, *The Portrayal of the Pharisees in the Gospels and Acts*, 156–58. For the pervasive belief in resurrection in the OT, see Jon D. Levenson, *Resurrection and the Restoration of Israel: The Ultimate Victory of the God of Life* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006).

⁸³ Matthew L. Skinner, *The Trial Narratives: Conflict, Power, and Identity in the NT* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2010), 141, 147. Concerning Paul’s speech before King Agrippa in Acts 26, Loveday C. A. Alexander writes, “Luke effectively turns Paul’s last and fullest apologetic speech into a restatement and defence of his whole theological standpoint before a figure who can be identified as a symbolic spokesman for Diaspora Judaism” (“The Acts of the Apostles as an Apologetic Text,” in idem, *Acts in its Ancient Literary Context: A Classicist Looks at the Acts of the Apostles* [London: T&T Clark International, 2005], 205).

⁸⁴ *Affirming the Resurrection of the Incarnate Christ: A Reading of 1 John* (SNTSMS 153; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 60–65.

⁸⁵ Nienhuis and Wall, *Reading the Epistles*, 52–68; cf. David R. Nienhuis, *Not by Paul Alone: The Formation of the Catholic Epistle Collection and the Christian Canon* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2007),

orientation of their reading of the intra-canonical relationship is not compelling, one reason being that it is too narrowly focused on one particular heretical threat to the exclusion of other potential distortions of the apostolic witness. As well, their reading underestimates the role of Acts in relation to *both* corpora. In line with what Wall has written elsewhere,⁸⁶ I would contend that the canonical dynamics are a little different than what he and Nienhuis suggest, and a more nuanced summation of the manuscript evidence would be that interaction between the two epistolary corpora is *mediated* by the book of Acts. Acts indicates that the Pauline and Catholic corpora have a wider readership than just their original addressees.

In what can be viewed as an expression of emerging canon consciousness,⁸⁷ in 2 Pet 3:15–16 Peter reciprocates by commending the teaching of Paul,⁸⁸ acknowledging that the literary corpus of Paul (“all his letters”) is also directed and relevant to Peter’s own readers in Asia Minor (“So also our beloved brother Paul wrote *to you* [ὑμῖν] according to the wisdom given him”). Peter attributes the writings of Paul to his God-given “wisdom,” and wisdom in the Letter of James (in accordance with OT usage) has a distinctly ethical orientation. Such wisdom is reflected in behavior by teachers that promotes community unity and peace (Jam 3:13–18; cf. the “fruit of the Spirit” in Gal 5:22–23).⁸⁹ Peter, therefore, represents Paul the letter-writer as a peacemaker and unifying figure within the Christian movement.

VI. ACTS AS THE UNIFYING CENTER OF THE NT

As briefly noted above, David E. Smith argues that the book of Acts “functioned for the Church Fathers as the literary unifier of Scripture and that this function was a major factor for its canonization.”⁹⁰ According to Smith, Acts brings together the OT (viewed as prophecy), the Gospels (representing Jesus), Paul’s Epistles (representing Paul), and the General Epistles and Revelation (representing the Jerusalem apostles), doing so “by uniting *texts* of the Old Testament with the authoritative *persons* of the New Testament.”⁹¹ All these figures are, according to Acts, endowed by the Holy Spirit, so that whatever the diversity of their modes of

85–90; Robert W. Wall, “A Canonical Approach to the Unity of Acts and Luke’s Gospel,” in *Rethinking the Unity and Reception*, 174.

⁸⁶ Wall, “Acts and James,” in Niebuhr and Wall, eds., *The Catholic Epistles and Apostolic Tradition*, 130: “Acts provides a distinctive and formative angle of vision into both Pauline and Catholic collections that follow”; idem, “The Unity of Acts and Luke’s Gospel,” 190 n. 23: “I take it that the principal role of the biblical Acts is to introduce and frame the two canonical collections of letters that follow.”

⁸⁷ Andreas J. Köstenberger and Michael J. Kruger, *The Heresy of Orthodoxy: How Contemporary Culture’s Fascination with Diversity Has Reshaped Our Understanding of Early Christianity* (Nottingham, UK: Apollos, 2010), 127–29.

⁸⁸ See Michael J. Kruger, “The Authenticity of 2 Peter,” *JETS* 42 (1999): 645–671; idem, *The Question of Canon: Challenging the Status Quo in the NT Debate* (Nottingham, UK: Apollos, 2013), 73–75.

⁸⁹ For the primary application of Jas 3:13–18 to teachers, see Robert W. Wall, *Community of the Wise: The Letter of James* (The NT in Context; Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1997), 179–91.

⁹⁰ David E. Smith, “Acts and the Structure of the Christian Bible,” in *Contemporary Studies in Acts*, 93.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 95 (italics original).

expression, they must teach a compatible message. Using the writings of Irenaeus, Tertullian, Cyril of Jerusalem, and John Chrysostom, Smith argues that ‘for the church fathers, if Acts demonstrates the unified preaching of the apostles, it demonstrates the unity of their writings as well, their writings being extensions of their preaching.’⁹² This, therefore, was the value of Acts to the Church Fathers.

The positing of a central role for Acts within the NT canon is supported by the argument of Walter Vogels that the book of Acts plays the same structural role in the NT as do the Former Prophets (Hebrew canon) or Historical Books (Greek canon) for the OT.⁹³ These books continue the story of salvation begun in the Pentateuch as a foundational document and form the historical framework for the prophetic books and wisdom books that follow. Prophetic figures of the likes of Samuel, Nathan, Gad, Elijah, Jonah, and Isaiah punctuate the narratives of 1, 2 Samuel and 1, 2 Kings. Wisdom figures such as Jonadab, Ahithophel, Hushai, and Solomon feature in 2 Samuel and 1 Kings. These narrative works help to hold together the OT as a unified canonical structure. By analogy, the book of Acts continues the narration of salvation history begun in the Gospels and provides an historical and theological frame for reading the letters of Peter, John, James, and Paul.

Though Smith makes little reference to the alternate canonical positions assigned to Acts in his argument that this book is the “glue” that holds the canonical writings of the NT together,⁹⁴ this data could be held to bolster his theory. The existence of the two canonical orders discussed above warns the reader against making one or other order the exclusive basis for interpretation.⁹⁵ The fact that early readers differed over where they placed particular books serves as a reminder that book order represents an *interpretation* of the biblical text. There is a “canon logic” to each arrangement of books. The logic of placing Paul’s letters immediately after Acts is that Paul’s story dominates the second half of that book and the account of Paul’s arrival in Rome (Acts 28) is immediately followed by his letter to the Romans in which he anticipates his visit to that city (Rom 1:8–15).⁹⁶ Paul’s efforts in Acts to maintain the unity of Jewish and Gentile believers serve to alert readers of this concern in his letters, which are, therefore, not just for Gentile Christians. The (alternate) logic of having the Catholic Epistles follow Acts is that this order draws attention to the fact that Acts features apostles other than Paul (notably Peter) and that Paul himself proclaimed the gospel to Jews as well as to

⁹² Ibid., 97 (addition mine); for an expanded version of the argument, see idem, *Canonical Function of Acts*.

⁹³ “La Structure symétrique de la Bible chrétienne,” in *Biblical Canons*, 298, 300; cf. Greg Goswell, “Two Testaments in Parallel: The Influence of the OT on the Structuring of the NT Canon,” *JETS* 56 (2013): 459–74.

⁹⁴ He only touches on the issue in the process of critiquing Childs and Wall (*Canonical Function of Acts*, 39, 40).

⁹⁵ Richard Bauckham also sounds this warning in *James* (NT Readings; London: Routledge, 1999), 115, 116.

⁹⁶ Cf. Robert W. Wall, “Romans 1:1–15: An Introduction to the Pauline Corpus of the NT,” in Robert W. Wall and E. E. Lemcio, eds., *The NT as Canon: A Reader in Canonical Criticism* (JSNTSup 76; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992), 142–60.

Gentiles. The Paul of Acts, in effect, gives the Catholic Epistles his imprimatur, so that the non-Pauline letters are not just for churches in which believers of Jewish background predominate.

VII. CONCLUSIONS

In the NT canon the harmonious relations in Acts between Paul's Gentile mission and the Jewish mission of James, Peter, and John preface the apostolic witness of the letters that follow. In its canonical settings, Acts is a consensus document that provides the context for interpreting the Pauline and Catholic corpora, not as competing traditions within the early church, but as complementary, signaling that both are of permanent value to the people of God as a whole.⁹⁷ The coordinating function of the book of Acts implies that the Pauline Epistles are not just for the Gentiles, nor are the Catholic Epistles only for Jewish believers. The book of Acts asserts the universal applicability of the different outlooks preserved in the Pauline and Catholic letter collections.

⁹⁷ For Acts as a consensus document, see C. K. Barrett, *The Acts of the Apostles*, vol. 2 (ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998), xl–xlii, lxiii–xli. Barrett, however, takes this as indicating that Acts comes from a latter “time of consensus,” so that Paul’s prophecy of the coming of “grievous wolves” who will divide the church (Acts 20:29, 30) is, for Barrett, *vaticinium post eventum* (p. lxiii).