

AUTHORSHIP AND ANONYMITY IN THE NEW TESTAMENT WRITINGS

GREGORY GOSWELL*

Abstract: *The attribution of authorship to the NT writings is a hermeneutical issue, for it shapes the expectations of readers. This is especially the case for anonymous works (the four Gospels, Acts, and Hebrews). The act of ascribing texts to authors connects the texts of the NT writings in a web of associations, and this has the tendency to affirm the unity of the NT witness to Jesus Christ. The names of Mark and Silvanus serve to connect Paul and Peter, just as Timothy is a link between Paul and the author of Hebrews. The connection of Mark and Luke with Paul leads the reader of the NT to expect that the teaching of the Pauline Corpus will be consistent with the presentation of the person and work of Christ in the Four Gospel Collection. The book of Acts depicts the partnership of Peter and John in gospel ministry and draws a picture of the harmonious relations between Paul and James. In fact, Acts plays a key canonical role in displaying the unity of the early Christian leaders and, in this way, affirms the compatibility of the teachings attributed to them.*

Key words: *author, anonymity, book titles, Acts, unity*

This survey of the NT writings is based on the supposition that consideration of the (possible) authorship of Bible books is hermeneutically significant and productive of an increased understanding of the biblical text.¹ This is by no means the agreed basis upon which NT scholars carry on their work, and so I will need to argue for the viability of the approach I will take. Often the effort to identify the biblical author is viewed as an irrelevant concern for the exegete, and the “implied author” is seen as “a more helpful construct for interpretation,”² or else the traditionally-assigned authorship of the various biblical books is stoutly defended but few or no hermeneutical implications are drawn from the position taken. For any book that is, strictly speaking, anonymous (e.g. the four Gospels, Acts, and Hebrews),³ the attribution of authorship is a paratextual phenomenon as opposed to a textual one. As in the case of book order and the book titles, the attribution of authorship to anonymous texts is an aspect of the biblical paratext because affixing an

* Gregory Goswell is Lecturer in Biblical Studies at Christ College, 1 Clarence Street, Burwood NSW 2134, Australia. He may be contacted at ggoswellptc@gmail.com.

¹ For the recognition of authorship as a hermeneutical issue, see Kevin J. Vanhoozer, “The Hermeneutics of I-Witness Testimony: John 21:20–24 and the ‘Death’ of the ‘Author,’” in *Understanding Poets and Prophets: Essays in Honour of George Wishart Anderson* (ed. A. Graeme Auld; JSOTSup 152; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 366–87.

² Jeannine K. Brown, “Matthew, Gospel of,” in *DJG* 575.

³ See Armin D. Baum, “The Anonymity of the New Testament Books: A Stylistic Device in the Context of Greco-Roman and Ancient Near Eastern Literature,” *NovT* 50 (2008): 120–42.

author's name to a book allows the grouping of texts for the purposes of study, perhaps different from the canonical order(s) of the biblical books (e.g. the Johannine corpus, Luke-Acts), even though these orders have in part been influenced by suppositions about authorship. Attributing authors to otherwise anonymous writings can be viewed as "implied reading instructions" supplied by those responsible for presenting the NT materials in this way.⁴ In drawing conclusions about who wrote what and preserving these interpretive deductions in the titles applied to the biblical books, early readers of the NT writings provided a guide to subsequent readers.

I. DOES AUTHORSHIP MATTER?

The concept of authorship is a vexed and contested issue today. A mark of recent literary theory and practice has been a shift of focus from author to text and from text to reader (the so-called "three ages of criticism"). The stress on the reader led Roland Barthes to talk of "the death of the author" ("La Mort de l'auteur") and to claim: "The birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the author."⁵ In other words, to give the reader a greater say over the meaning of a literary work, the privileged position of the author as the maker of meaning had to be abolished. This is not a denial of the empirical fact that every literary work is written by someone (it would be ridiculous to deny that), but an assertion that authorship of a work is *hermeneutically* irrelevant. The problem with authorship (for Barthes) is that it prevents the endless multiplication of meanings. Severing the connection of text to author opens a text to a boundless variety of interpretations.⁶ Michel Foucault makes the same point in these words: "The author is the principle of thrift in the proliferation of meaning."⁷ Foucault expresses the hope that "the author function" will disappear in the cause of human freedom, though he fears that some new form of constraint will be experienced. On that basis, for those who read Scripture as a revelation of God and his ways (and of what we should be and do in response) there is much to be lost in a loss of the author, for the "author" is "a figure for determinate sense" whereas the "reader" is "a figure for unlimited semiosis."⁸

⁴ David Trobisch, *The First Edition of the New Testament* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 45. In what follows I acknowledge my dependence on Trobisch (pp. 45–60).

⁵ Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author," in *Image, Music, Text* (trans. Stephen Heath; London: Fontana, 1977), 148.

⁶ Seán Burke, *The Death and Return of the Author: Criticism and Subjectivity in Barthes, Foucault and Derrida* (3rd ed.; Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008), 41.

⁷ Michel Foucault, "What Is an Author?," in *The Foucault Reader* (ed. Paul Rabinow; Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin, 1984), 118.

⁸ Francis Watson, "Authors, Readers, Hermeneutics," in *Reading Scripture with the Church: Toward a Hermeneutic for Theological Interpretation* (ed. A. K. M. Adam et al.; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 120; cf. Barthes, "Death of the Author," 147: "To give a text an Author is to impose a limit on that text, to furnish it with a final signified, to close the writing." For an attempt to resurrect the author (making use of speech-act theory), see Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text? The Bible, the Reader, and the Morality of Literary Knowledge* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 201–80; see also Nicholas Wolterstorff,

As pointed out by Foucault, however, it is difficult to make the author entirely disappear or to abolish the author's privileges.⁹ True enough, discovering meaning in biblical texts is not strictly dependent on the precise identification of their authors,¹⁰ but that does not mean to say that specifying an author does not contribute to meaning. The supplying of an author's name has more than one possible role:¹¹ (1) it shows the interconnection of texts (via common or related authors), enabling texts to be grouped, establishing a relationship between texts (e.g. reciprocal explication, filiation) and suggesting that their viewpoints are compatible and coherent; (2) it may link a work to a particular time, date, culture, and provenance, thus ruling out certain interpretations as impossible; (3) it separates literary works, differentiating a text from and contrasting it with other texts, and so protecting its separate perspective and viewpoint;¹² (4) it gives a text "a certain status" as non-ephemeral and serious, and the phenomenon of pseudepigraphal works shows that connection to a known author was considered advantageous and even essential; (5) it may help to support the authenticity and accuracy of what is said, by narrowing the historical distance between the events described and date of composition (maybe positing access to eyewitness testimony). Therefore, though decidedly out of fashion, questions of authorship need to be raised and addressed. In the discussion that follows, I will focus on the first of the above-mentioned roles, the way in which the attribution of authorship potentially connects different texts in a network of associations, and, in the case of the NT writings, this has the tendency (whether intended or not) to affirm the unity of the NT witness to Jesus Christ.

Recognizing the historical construction of authorship,¹³ there is the danger of an anachronistic imposition of more recent notions of authorship from the age of print, or even from the dawning age of the Internet, on ancient literary culture and

"Resuscitating the Author," in *Hermeneutics at the Crossroads* (ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer, James K. A. Benson and Bruce Ellis; Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2006), 35–50, who argues that interpretation is engagement with a person (the author) by means of the text (artifact) that he or she wrote.

⁹ See Foucault, "What Is an Author?," 102–5. According to Seán Burke, "While the author-function varies in fact and principle from one historical context to another, it never disappears—least of all in those moments when it is concertedly attacked" (*Authorship from Plato to Postmodern: A Reader* [Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1995], x). Burke calls for a return and a repositioning of authorship, without reverting to "modernity's characterisation of authorship as autonomous agency" (p. xxviii).

¹⁰ Where would scholarship on the Letter to the Hebrews be if that were the case?

¹¹ For what follows, see also Foucault, "What Is an Author?," 107; cf. Karen L. King, "What Is an Author? Ancient Author-Function in the *Apocryphon of John* and the Apocalypse of John," in *Scribal Practices and Social Structures among Jesus Adherents: Essays in Honour of John S. Kloppenborg* (ed. William E. Arnal et al.; BETL 285; Leuven: Peeters, 2016), 18–19, 41.

¹² Francis Watson focuses on this possible function of attribution, arguing that the move to assign authors to the four Gospels aimed at protecting their individual identity and witness; see *The Fourfold Gospel: A Theological Reading of the New Testament Portraits of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016), 15.

¹³ Like Foucault, Jed Wyrick sees the author-text relationship as culturally and historically determined; see *The Ascension of Authorship: Attribution and Canon Formation in Jewish, Hellenistic, and Christian Traditions* (Harvard Studies in Comparative Literature 49; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), 7–8; cf. King, "What Is an Author?," 16–18.

on the phenomenon of biblical “authorship” in particular.¹⁴ The idea of intellectual property, plagiarism, and copyright are entirely foreign to the biblical world. Nor is biblical authorship about spontaneity, genius, creativity, imagination, autonomy, self-expression, self-revelation, or originality, such as is the case in the wake of the Renaissance and especially of the Romantic Movement.¹⁵ It is probable that the “authors” of the OT and NT did not write their books “from scratch,” as modern authors may do (drawing largely on personal experience and their reading), but instead relied on and improvised upon earlier texts, oral sources, or revered traditions, as was the pattern in ANE scribal practice.¹⁶ Therefore, at a minimum, what I mean by the term “author” when applied to a NT book is the person(s) responsible for the final form of the work, irrespective of how it may have been devised, crafted, and recorded.¹⁷

II. THE FOUR GOSPELS

The titles assigned to the four Gospels supply the name of the reputed authors,¹⁸ with textual features of the books supporting (or at least not contradicting) the attribution made and giving it credibility in the eyes of the reader. The texts of the Gospels do not explicitly divulge the names of their authors; for example, the Fourth Gospel does not disclose the name of “the beloved disciple” who reclined next to Jesus at the supper (John 13:23–25; 19:26; 21:7, 20) and whose testimony that Gospel preserves (John 19:35; 21:24).¹⁹ The names of John and his brother

¹⁴ For a brief genealogy of the author, starting from the medieval period, see Donald E. Pease, “Author,” in *Critical Terms for Literary Study* (ed. Frank Lentricchia and Thomas McLaughlin; 2nd ed.; Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995), 105–17; cf. M. H. Abrams, with contributions by Geoffrey Galt Harpham, “Author and Authorship,” in *A Glossary of Literary Terms* (8th ed.; Boston: Thomson Wadsworth, 2005), 15–18.

¹⁵ See Bruce J. Malina, “Were There ‘Authors’ in New Testament Times?,” in *To Set at Liberty: Essays on Early Christianity and its Social World in Honor of John H. Elliott* (ed. Stephen K. Black; Social World of Biblical Antiquity 2/11; Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2014), 262–65. In answer to his question, Malina says there were not.

¹⁶ John H. Sailhamer, *The Meaning of the Pentateuch: Revelation, Composition and Interpretation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2010), 248. For views on the production of biblical books that stress scribal culture, see John H. Walton and D. Brent Sandy, *The Lost World of Scripture: Ancient Literary Culture and Biblical Authority* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2013) and Karel van der Toorn, *Scribal Culture and the Making of the Hebrew Bible* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007). Van der Toorn rejects the usual distinction of author, editor, and scribe (109). On analogy with this, commenting on a very different literary genre (fairy-stories), J. R. R. Tolkien speaks of “the intricately knotted and ramified history of the branches on the Tree of Tales”; see Verlyn Flieger and Douglas A. Anderson, eds., *Tolkien On Fairy-Stories: Expanded Edition, with Commentary and Notes* (London: Harper Collins, 2008), 39.

¹⁷ My conclusion and wording is independent of the similar-sounding definition provided by Vanhoozer, “Hermeneutics of I-Witness Testimony,” 375.

¹⁸ For a recent review of the titles assigned to the four Gospels and a consideration of their significance for interpretation, see Silke Petersen, “Die Evangelienüberschriften und die Entstehung des neutestamentlichen Kanons,” *ZNW* 97 (2006): 250–74. Petersen recognizes the paratextual character of the ancient titles (272, 274).

¹⁹ For more, see Armin D. Baum, “The Original Epilogue (John 20:30–31), the Secondary Appendix (21:1–23), and the Editorial Epilogues (21:24–25) of John’s Gospel: Observations against the Background of Ancient Literary Conventions,” in *Earliest Christian History: History, Literature, and Theology*:

James are notably absent from the Fourth Gospel, though there is one mention of “the sons of Zebedee” (John 21:2). On the other hand, Peter is called “Simon, son of John,” significantly in the last chapter when he is being compared and contrasted with the (still) unnamed “beloved disciple” (John 1:42; 21:15, 16, 17). This could be viewed as hinting at the identity of “the beloved disciple,”²⁰ who is identified as the eyewitness source behind the Johannine tradition and the author of the Gospel (“and who has written these things”), though not of the last clause of 21:24 (“and we know that his testimony is true”).

That the name of John is a credible candidate as “the beloved disciple” in the Fourth Gospel is supported by evidence supplied in the Synoptic Gospels that he was one of the inner group of three within the apostolic band who were chosen by Jesus for special intimacy (Matt 17:1; 26:37; Mark 5:37; 13:3 [the last with the addition of Andrew]).²¹ The mention of Peter alongside the beloved disciple in John 21 means that Peter cannot be the author of that Gospel. The beloved disciple may also be the unnamed other disciple with Peter (and Andrew) in John 1:35–42, and, if so, this would form an *inclusio* around the body of the Fourth Gospel (cf. John 20:2: “Simon Peter and the other disciple”).²² Likewise, the early recorded death of James, the son of Zebedee (ca. AD 44) (Acts 12:2), excludes him as a candidate, so we are left with John.²³ The attribution may, however, be in some tension with agenda of the biblical author, for the Fourth Gospel withheld the name of the “beloved disciple.”²⁴

Essays from the Tyndale Fellowship in Honor of Martin Hengel (ed. Michael F. Bird and Jason Maston; WUNT 2/320; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012), 229–33. For an argument that John 21 is an original part of John’s Gospel, see Stanley E. Porter, *John, His Gospel, and Jesus: In Pursuit of the Johannine Voice* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 225–45.

²⁰ See also the argument of Christos Karakolis that the implied reader is meant to identify the unnamed beloved disciple with one of the unnamed sons of Zebedee; see “The Sons of Zebedee and Two Other Disciples: Two Pairs of Puzzling Acquaintances in the Johannine Dénouement,” in *Character Studies in the Fourth Gospel: Narrative Approaches to Seventy Figures in John* (ed. Steven A. Hunt et al.; WUNT 314; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), 663–76.

²¹ Trobisch, *First Edition of the New Testament*, 53.

²² For the various links between these two scenes, see M. Franzmann and M. Klinger, “The Call Stories of John 1 and John 21,” *SVTQ* 36 (1992): 7–15; Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 129.

²³ Irenaeus identifies the Fourth Evangelist as John (*Haer.* 3.1.1 quoted in Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 5.8.4). The attribution is not, however, without difficulty (e.g. how likely is it that a Galilean fisherman would be known to the high priest? [John 18:15]); see Alan Culpepper, *John, the Son of Zebedee: The Life of a Legend* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1994), 73–76; Watson, *Fourfold Gospel*, 82–85. According to Bauckham, the Fourth Gospel preserves the eyewitness testimony of John the Elder, who is to be distinguished from John the son of Zebedee (*Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, 155–181), and he claims the same view for Irenaeus (*Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, 452–471), but see 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.

²⁴ Trobisch, *First Edition of the New Testament*, 46. The anonymity of the Fourth Gospel may have served a literary function; see David R. Beck, *The Discipleship Paradigm: Readers and Anonymous Characters in the Fourth Gospel* (BIS 27; Leiden: Brill, 1997). According to Beck, it is the anonymous characters (culminating in the beloved disciple) who are the supreme paradigms of how to respond appropriately to Jesus. The absence of a name can assist readers in identifying with the exemplary character.

The identification of an author can be an element in an assigned title, and this is the case in the *inscriptions* for all four Gospels (e.g. “The Gospel according to Matthew”).²⁵ The Matthew in the title of the First Gospel is obviously intended to refer to the disciple by the same name, “Matthew the tax collector” (10:3), whose call is described in Matt 9:9. On this understanding, assuming the identification of the Evangelist and Matthew, the author gives himself a self-depreciatory designation,²⁶ which draws attention to his name in the listing of the twelve apostles, even as it shows that his call was not due to any worthiness on his part. In Mark and Luke, it is not made clear that the “Levi” who was called to follow (Mark 2:14; Luke 5:27) is to be identified with the “Matthew” listed among the Twelve (Mark 3:18; Luke 6:15). Only in the Gospel of Matthew is this clarified. The implication of the title, then, is that the book provides a firsthand account of many of the things narrated. Matthew is listed as present in the upper room at the beginning of Acts (1:13) but is never mentioned again in the NT. Ascribing a literary work to a prominent person as author, in this case an original disciple of Jesus, suggests something about its status, namely that it is not ephemeral literature. The link to an apostolic author would be viewed as guaranteeing its authority and acceptance. However, if the supplying of famous names implies the reliability of the tradition, why was no name attached to the Letter to the Hebrews?

The name “Mark” in the title of the Second Gospel is presumably intended to refer to the youthful resident of Jerusalem who bore that name (John Mark) and whose house was frequented by Peter (Acts 12:12). Peter’s self-effacement behind the tradition preserved by Mark is unmasked by the fact that he is the first and last apostolic character referred to in the Gospel (Mark 1:16; 16:7).²⁷ Later, Mark was the co-worker of Peter (1 Pet 5:13) and of Paul (Acts 12:25; Col 4:10; Phlm 24; 2 Tim 4:11).²⁸ That it is the same Mark is affirmed by the mention by Paul that he was the cousin of Barnabas (Col 4:10), which is one reason at least that Barnabas could not accept Paul’s decision that Mark not be given a second chance and again accompany them on mission (Acts 15:37–41; cf. 13:13). It appears that Paul was later reconciled to Mark and commended him as a useful co-worker. This is in line with the famous description by Papias (ca. AD 130) of the Evangelist Mark as “the interpreter of Peter” (ἑρμηνευτῆς Πέτρου),²⁹ but there are also striking similarities between the contents of Mark’s Gospel and the teaching of Paul, for example the

²⁵ Simon J. Gathercole, “The Earliest Manuscript Title of Matthew’s Gospel (BnF Suppl. gr. 1120 ii 3 / Φ^d),” *NoiT* 54 (2012): 209–35. This fragmentary Matthean inscription belonging to Φ^d has the longer title that includes εὐαγγέλιον. 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 (2013): 33–76.

²⁶ A point noted by Homer A. Kent Jr., “The Gospel According to Matthew,” in *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* (ed. Charles F. Pfeiffer and Everett F. Harrison; London: Oliphants, 1962), 945. For a different approach, see Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, 108–12.

²⁷ See Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, 124–127.

²⁸ Ulrich H. J. Körtner, “Markus der Mitarbeiter des Petrus,” *ZNW* 71 (1980): 160–73.

²⁹ Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 3.39.15 (PG 20.300); cf. C. Clifton Black, *Mark: Images of an Apostolic Interpreter* (SPNT; Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1994), 82–94.

use of the term “gospel” (εὐαγγέλιον; Mark 1:1; 10:29; 13:10; 14:9; cf. Gal 1:6–9; Rom 1:16–17) and the apocalyptic portents that attend the death of Jesus (Mk 15:33–38; cf. Gal 1:4; 6:14; 1 Cor 2:7–9; Col 1:12–14).³⁰ In this way, the name of Mark (once it is attached to the Second Gospel) serves to link the letter writers Peter and Paul with the Gospel Collection, so that its effect is to suggest the harmony of the different witnesses enshrined in the NT.

That the author of Luke’s Gospel is the co-worker of Paul is implied by his second volume (Acts), wherein the “we” passages report certain events in which the author was personally involved (Acts 16:10–17; 21:1–18; 27:1–28:16).³¹ The connection to Paul is buttressed by the name of Luke found in Paul’s own writings (Col 4:14; 2 Tim 4:11; Phlm 24). In the oldest Greek manuscript of Luke’s Gospel (Bodmer P⁷⁵) (ca. AD 200) at the end of the Gospel is found the subscription “Gospel According to Luke.”³² Irenaeus (ca. AD 180) states that “Luke also, the companion (ἀκόλουθος; *sectator*) of Paul, set down in writing the gospel preached by him.”³³ The Muratorian Canon, a Latin fragment from the late second century, states that the third book of the Gospel is “according to Luke” (*secundum Lucam*).³⁴ The fragment refers to Luke as “the well-known physician” (dependent on Col 4:14). It notes his personal connection to Paul and implies that his authority to write such a Gospel was due to his link to Paul.³⁵ Likewise, Tertullian states that just as Mark was dependent on Peter, so Paul stands behind Luke, and Tertullian makes these comments on the basis of the principle that the writings of disciples can be regarded as that of their teachers.³⁶ Accordingly, the title of the Third Gospel (read in coordination with Acts) helps to bridge between the Four Gospel Corpus and the Pauline letters, and these links would seem to disallow any interpretation that views Paul as slighting the importance of the historical record of Jesus’s

³⁰ For the similarities, see Joel Marcus, “Mark: Interpreter of Paul,” *NTS* 46 (2000): 473–87; and Michael F. Bird, “Mark: Interpreter of Peter and Disciple of Paul,” in *Paul and the Gospels: Christologies, Conflicts, and Convergences* (ed. Michael F. Bird and Joel Willits; LNTS 411; London: T&T Clark, 2011), 30–61, esp. 39–52.

³¹ Though disputed, this is still the most likely explanation, see Jürgen Wehnert, *Die Wir-Passagen der Apostelgeschichte: Ein lukanisches Stilmittel aus jüdischer Tradition* (GTA 40; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1989); Colin J. Hemer, *The Book of Acts in the Setting of Hellenistic History* (ed. Conrad H. Gempf; WUNT 49; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1989), 312–34; Osvaldo Padilla, *The Acts of the Apostles: Interpretation, History and Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2016), 21–31. For the view that the “we” passages are an incorporated source, see Stanley E. Porter, *The Paul of Acts: Essays in Literary Criticism, Rhetoric, and Theology* (WUNT 115; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1999), 10–46.

³² David E. Aune, “The Meaning of Εὐαγγέλιον in the Inscriptions of the Canonical Gospels,” in *Jesus, Gospel Tradition and Paul in the Context of Jewish and Greco-Roman Antiquity: Collected Essays II* (WUNT 303; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), 18.

³³ *Haer.* 3.3.1.

³⁴ For the second century dating of the Muratorian Canon, see the arguments (*pace* Hahneman) by Joseph Verheyden, “The Canon Muratori: A Matter of Dispute,” in *The Biblical Canons* (ed. J.-M. Auwers and H. J. de Jonge; BETL 163; Leuven: Peeters, 2003), 487–556.

³⁵ Muratorian Fragment, lines 2–5 (translation provided by Bruce M. Metzger, *The Canon of the New Testament: Its Origin, Development, and Significance* [Oxford: Clarendon, 1987], 305–7).

³⁶ *Adv. Mar.* 4.5.2–4 (Migne PL 2.367; qui nec discipuli existere potuissent sine ulla doctrina magistrorum?).

life (cf. 2 Cor 5:16), or as needlessly complicating or even corrupting the gospel proclaimed by Jesus (as recorded by Luke).³⁷

What we have seen, therefore, is that the use of the names of the evangelists Mark and Luke refers readers to passages in Acts, 1 Peter, and the letters of Paul, with the effect of indicating the harmony and cooperation between Paul and the Jerusalemite leadership.³⁸ So also, the Four Gospel Collection assumes and asserts the compatibility and complementarity of these non-harmonized representations of the person and ministry of Jesus, including the strikingly different portrait of Jesus provided by John in contrast to the Synoptics, though there is no evidence that John seeks to supplant the Synoptics.³⁹ Trobisch views this image of harmony as contradicted by the record of the Antiochene clash between Peter and Paul in Galatians 2, with nothing stated in Galatians about their later reconciliation.⁴⁰

This discussion of the titular labelling of the Gospels according to the names of their reputed authors (e.g. “The Gospel according to John”) is not to be misconstrued as arguing for or against any specific historical identification of the authors. That is a strictly historical investigation, whereas the present discussion concerns the hermeneutical effects of attaching certain names (Matthew, Mark, etc.) to literary works that are, strictly speaking, anonymous. All in all, the titles of the four Gospels, incorporating as they do the names of their supposed authors, assist in giving the impression of the theological unity of the NT witness to Christ.

III. THE LETTERS AND REVELATION

According to their superscriptions (e.g. Rom 1:1; Eph 1:1), the Pauline epistles all have the same principal author (Paul) and so they are named, and thereby differentiated one from the other, according to whom they were addressed (e.g. Romans, Corinthians). In this study, “Paul” is the name of the reputed author supplied in the epistolary superscriptions and a character depicted in the book of Acts. I will not enter into the question of the historical authorship of the Pastoral Epistles and other letters often deemed deutero-Pauline (Ephesians, Colossians, 2 Thessalonians),⁴¹ but will take for granted that none of the thirteen Pauline letters was

³⁷ See the discussion by C. K. Barrett about the Bultmann School that viewed Paul as having no interest in the “Jesus of history” (*The Second Epistle to the Corinthians* [BNTC; 2nd ed.; London: Adam & Charles Black, 1973], 171). Origen viewed Paul in 2 Cor 8:18 as referring to and commending Luke and his Gospel (Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 6.25.6).

³⁸ Cf. Trobisch, *First Edition of the New Testament*, 46: “the authoritative names are part of a carefully woven web holding together the disparate parts of the New Testament.”

³⁹ On this, see Richard Bauckham, *Gospel of Glory: Major Themes in Johannine Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015), 185–201. Bauckham notes the explicit incompleteness of John’s highly-selective presentation with regard to, for example, Jesus’s miracles (John 2:23; 3:2; 4:45; 20:30), his teaching to the crowds (John 7:14; 18:19–21), and his Galilean ministry (John 7:1).

⁴⁰ See on this below. Trobisch, *First Edition of the New Testament*, 46.

⁴¹ For recent accounts of this debate, see Mark Harding, “Disputed and Undisputed Letters of Paul,” in *The Pauline Canon* (ed. Stanley Porter; Pauline Studies 1; Leiden: Brill, 2004), 129–68, and I. Howard Marshall, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles* (ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991), 57–92.

misattributed. Instead, the focus of my discussion is the hermeneutical effects of the post-authorial titles assigned to the literary works that make up the NT. At the same time, the names of the different churches in the titles are in effect cross-references to accounts given in Acts about the different churches that have letters written to them (e.g. the founding of the church in Philippi in Acts 16). The only exception to this is Colossians, for the churches of the Lycus valley were not founded by Paul (see Col 2:1). The accounts in Acts provide the reader with background information about the churches that have letters addressed to them, so that it is natural to read the letters of Paul through the lens provided by the missionary narrative of Acts, with the result that the letters are interpreted as having a missional theology rather than as doctrinal treatises.

The gathering of the Pauline epistles into a corpus, and the Vulgate titles that reflect this as an established fact (*Epistola Pauli ad Romanos*, *Epistola Pauli ad Corinthios Prima*, etc.), obscure the involvement of others in the production of the letters so designated. Perhaps all of Paul's letters were written by the hand of an amanuensis.⁴² This is made explicit in the case of his letter to the Romans (16:22: "I Tertius, the writer of this letter, greet you in the Lord").⁴³ The noted presence of other persons implies that they had some involvement in the framing of the letter, namely the correspondence was written collaboratively (Rom 16:21).⁴⁴ When Paul writes a final part of a letter with his own hand (1 Cor 16:21; Gal 6:11; Col 4:18; 2 Thess 3:17; Phlm 19), the involvement of a scribe is also made plain.⁴⁵ As well, the opening of most of his letters mention co-senders who may have had some joint-authorial role:⁴⁶ 1 Cor 1:1 (Paul and Sosthenes), 2 Cor 1:1 (Paul and Timothy), Phil 1:1 (Paul and Timothy), Col 1:1 (Paul and Timothy), 1 Thess 1:1 (Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy), 2 Thess 1:1 (Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy), and Phlm 1 (Paul and Timothy). At the very least, the named co-senders are understood to stand in solidarity with Paul and express support for Paul and what he says in his letters.⁴⁷ The common English titles derived from the Vulgate titles (e.g. KJV "The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans") by only mentioning the name of one addresser

⁴² E. Randolph Richards, *The Secretary in the Letters of Paul* (WUNT 2/42; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1991), 189–94.

⁴³ For a full discussion, see Ian J. Elmer, "I, Tertius: Secretary or Co-Author of Romans," *ABR* 56 (2008): 45–60.

⁴⁴ This is stressed by Malina, "Were There 'Authors' in New Testament Times?," 267–70; see also the discussion of Pauline collaborators as co-authors in Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, *Paul the Letter-Writer: His World, His Options, His Skills* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 1995), 6–34.

⁴⁵ For the autographic subscription in large letters in Gal 6:11, see Steve Reece, *Paul's Large Letters: Paul's Autographic Subscriptions in the Light of Ancient Epistolary Conventions* (LNTS 561; London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2017).

⁴⁶ For a helpful discussion of this feature, see Murray J. Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 130–32; Richards, *The Secretary in the Letters of Paul*, 153–58, esp. 154: "The practice of including others in the address as a 'nicety' is not supported by the evidence." Jeffery A. D. Weima rejects the idea that they were co-authors and sees the mention of co-senders as serving other epistolary functions, see *Paul the Ancient Letter Writer: An Introduction to Epistolary Analysis* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016), 27–32.

⁴⁷ See also Arthur G. Patzia, *The Making of the New Testament: Origin, Collection, Text and Canon* (2nd ed.; Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2011), 113–14.

(Paul) imply that the teaching and instructions derive exclusively from one apostolic personality. Unfortunately, the clipped titles obscure links to non-Pauline letters, especially 1 Peter that has connections with the Pauline circle in the person of Silvanus as letter-carrier (5:12),⁴⁸ and fuller titles would have encouraged a fruitful conversation between the Pauline and Petrine corpora.

The title supplied to the anonymous book “To the Hebrews” (Πρὸς Ἑβραίους) is a connection to Pauline letters that in every case bear the name of the addressee (whether a church or an individual). Those to whom the author of Hebrews wrote are not named “the Hebrews” within the book itself, so that the title appears to have been coined on analogy with the Greek titles of the Pauline letters (Πρὸς Ῥωμαίους, etc). Therefore, for Trobisch, the title of the anonymous letter to the Hebrews manipulates the reaction of potential readers and implies the name of Paul,⁴⁹ without requiring readers to conclude that the author was Paul. In other words, the title “To the Hebrews” closely connects it to the Pauline corpus, and in fact, there is no manuscript evidence to suggest that Hebrews ever circulated independently of that corpus.⁵⁰ This implies the compatibility of the teaching of Hebrews with the message of Paul. It was not without reason that ancient readers detected contacts between Hebrews and the Pauline corpus and they signalled this discovery by placing Hebrews where they did in various ancient manuscripts and canonical lists (e.g. after Romans in \mathfrak{P}^{46} [ca. AD 200]). This is an example of how canonical book order is an indicator of how biblical books were interpreted in antiquity. Hebrews has connections to Paul, the most obvious being the closing verses of the book (13:22–24). Though the postscript does not attribute the authorship of the work to Paul, it makes an indirect connection to him by its reference to “our brother Timothy,” whom the anonymous author acknowledges as co-worker and companion, for his expressed hope is that he will visit his addressees with Timothy.⁵¹ This comment by the author of Hebrews, therefore, effectively puts him within the Pauline circle,⁵² so that whatever differences there may be between Hebrews and the teaching of Paul, the canonical placement of Hebrews and the title assigned to it assert their compatibility (and maybe their complementarity).⁵³

The James and Jude in the epistolary titles are presumably the half-brothers of Jesus (cf. Matt 13:55; Mark 6:3), and this is corroborated by the authors’ self-reference not as apostles but as “servants” of Jesus Christ (Jas 1:1; Jude 1). In the opening of his letter, note Jude’s additional deferential self-designation: “and

⁴⁸ E. Randolph Richards, “Silvanus Was not Peter’s Secretary: Theological Bias in Interpreting *δια Σιλουανου ... εγραψα* in 1 Peter 5:12,” *JETS* 43 (2000): 417–32.

⁴⁹ *First Edition of the New Testament*, 59.

⁵⁰ Clare K. Rothschild, *Hebrews as Pseudepigraphon: The History and Significance of the Pauline Attribution of Hebrews* (WUNT 235; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009), 145–47.

⁵¹ A point made by Gareth Lee Cockerill, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 721. Timothy is acknowledged by Paul as a “brother” (ἀδελφός) in 2 Cor 1:1, Col 1:1, 1 Thess 3:2, and Phlm 1.

⁵² As recognized by Origen (Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 6.25.13 [PG 20.584–585]).

⁵³ For more details, see Gregory Goswell, “Finding a Home for the Letter to the Hebrews,” *JETS* 59 (2016): 747–60.

brother of James.” The letters from the two brothers form an *inclusio* around the Catholic Epistles. Titular use of their names is another link between the epistles, the Gospels, and Acts (cf. Acts 1:12–14; 15:6–21). In the corpus of Catholic Epistles with its seven booklets, the apostles of Christ (Peter/John) and the family of Jesus (James/Jude) form a chorus in witness to him. The prominence of Peter in both the Gospels and Acts is another unifying factor between the different parts of the NT.⁵⁴ Petrine authorship is claimed in 1 Pet 1:1 (and also in 2 Pet 1:1 [and 3:1 by implication]), yet the letter also manifests connections with the Pauline circle in the persons of Silvanus and Mark mentioned in 1 Pet 5:12–13 (cf. Silas in Acts 15:40, etc.).⁵⁵ Likewise, there is the valorization of the writings of Paul as a known collection (“all his letters”) that embodied God-given wisdom (“according to the wisdom given to him”) in 2 Pet 3:15–16, and this passage reflects a canonical consciousness.⁵⁶ In canonical terms, Paul, in his own letters, can be understood as reciprocating with his affirmation of Peter as a leading apostle and witness to Christ’s resurrection (1 Cor 1:12–13; 9:5; 15:5, 11; Gal 1:18 [RSV “to visit Cephas”]; 2:7, 8, 9).⁵⁷

The author of the Fourth Gospel, named John in the assigned title, also has to his credit three epistles (1, 2, 3 John) and the book of Revelation in which the prophetic author is finally named (Rev 1:1, 4, 9; 22:8). The identification is favored by the fact that there is no attempt to differentiate between these Johns in the assigned titles,⁵⁸ so that the intention of those responsible for the 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), would serve to confirm the assumption. So, too, the “I am” sayings of Revelation (e.g. 1:17; 2:23; 21:6; 22:13, 16) can be compared to those in the Fourth Gospel. The opening lines of 2 and 3 John announce the sender’s identity, but do so without supplying a name (“the elder”),⁵⁹ but the elder’s theological profile matches that of the Beloved Disciple (e.g. his love ethic and anti-docetic stance). This is a further way in which Gospels and epistles are shown to be alternate mediums for the same message that centers on Jesus Christ.

⁵⁴ Marcus Bockmuehl, *The Remembered Peter: In Ancient Reception and Modern Debate* (WUNT 262; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010).

⁵⁵ Jens Herzer, *Petrus oder Paulus? Studien über das Verhältnis des Ersten Petrusbriefes zur paulinischen Tradition* (WUNT 103; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1998), 62–73; Karl-Wilhelm Niebuhr, “Exegese im kanonischen Zusammenhang: Überlegungen zur theologischen Relevanz der Gestalt des neutestamentlichen Kanons,” in *The Biblical Canons*, 575–577; Marcus Bockmuehl, *Simon Peter in Scripture and Memory: The New Testament Apostle in the Early Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012), 31.

⁵⁶ See Anton Vögtle, “Petrus und Paulus nach dem Zweiten Petrusbrief,” in *Kontinuität und Einheit: Für Franz Mußner* (ed. Paul-Gerhard Müller and Werner Stenger; Freiburg: Herder, 1981), 225–228.

⁵⁷ Marcus Bockmuehl, *Seeing the Word: Refocusing New Testament Study* (Studies in Theological Interpretation; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 112.

⁵⁸ A point made by Trobisch, *The First Edition of the New Testament*, 55; also Robert W. Wall, “The Apocalypse of the New Testament in Canonical Context,” in *The New Testament as Canon: A Reader in Canonical Criticism* (ed. Robert W. Wall and Eugene E. Lemcio; JSNTSup 76; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992), 282–86.

⁵⁹ Culpepper, *John, the Son of Zebedee*, 83–84.

Based on the carefully constructed network of authorial cross-references that we find on reading the NT, as outlined above, it does not seem justified to isolate and differentiate Pauline, Petrine, and Johannine versions of Christianity or to posit that they were segregated in hermetically sealed communities of believers; rather, the expectation generated is that we will find substantial connections and commonalities in the teaching of these different early Christian leaders. This impression of unity is reinforced by indications within the NT itself of significant overlaps in audience and sphere of influence for the different authors: Peter wrote to “Asia” (= Ephesus?; 1 Pet 1:1) as did Paul (Eph 1:1); Peter wrote from “Babylon” (= Rome; 1 Pet 5:13) and Paul wrote to the Roman church and visited it; John wrote to Ephesus and Laodicea (Rev 2:1–7; 3:15–22) as also did Paul (Eph 1:1; Col 4:16); both Peter and James wrote to Christian believers among the Jewish diaspora (1 Pet 1:1; Jas 1:1); and it is possible, even probable, that Peter had visited Corinth as had Paul (1 Cor 1:12; 3:22).⁶⁰

IV. MEETINGS BETWEEN NT AUTHORS IN ACTS

Except for the letter about the conciliar decree in Acts 15:22–35, the book of Acts makes no mention of any early Christian leader writing letters. Nevertheless, Acts plays a key role within the NT canon in promoting the theological unity of the NT, for it “cultivates a sense of the relationships among the letter writers.”⁶¹ The harmonious relations between the apostles and the family of Jesus (Acts 1:12–14), between Peter and John (3:1–11; 4:13, 19; 8:14), between Peter and James (11:1–18; 12:17) and between James and Paul (15:1–29; 21:17–26) are depicted at strategic points in the story of the spread of the gospel as told by Acts. As noted by Wall, seeing these interactions are portrayed as collaborative, the picture of ecclesial harmony in Acts should frame an interpreter’s evaluation of the relations between the writings attributed to the various early church figures.⁶²

In the opening chapter of Acts, there is a gathering of the eleven disciples and the family of Jesus (his mother and brothers; 1:12–14; cf. Mark 6:3). Although James is not identified as the half-brother of Jesus in Acts (12:17; 15:13; 21:28; cf. Gal 1:19) and Jude is not mentioned in Acts, it appears that some five of the NT authors are joined in common prayer in “the upper room.” The narrational focus is on their unity, given the fact that we are told that they all (πάντες) were devoting themselves together (ὁμοθυμαδόν) in prayer (1:14).⁶³ In Acts, Peter contributes to the unity of missionary efforts by resisting pressure by some to impose circumci-

⁶⁰ For the widespread travels of early Christian leaders, see Richard Bauckham, “For Whom Were Gospels Written?,” in *The Gospels for All Christians: Rethinking the Gospel Audiences* (ed. Richard Bauckham; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998), 33–37.

⁶¹ Robert W. Wall with Richard B. Steele, *1 and 2 Timothy and Titus* (IHTNC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 38; cf. Niebuhr, “Exegese im kanonischen Zusammenhang,” 583.

⁶² For the mediating role of Acts in relation to the epistolary corpora, see Gregory Goswell, “The Place of the Book of Acts in Reading the NT,” *JETS* 59 (2016): 67–82.

⁶³ As noted by 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), 67 n. 47.

sion on Gentile converts, with the narration of the Cornelius episode and its gospel implications about non-Jewish inclusion given a threefold repetition in the book (10:1–48; 11:1–18; 15:7–9).⁶⁴ Especially significant is Peter's successful defence of his position before "the apostles and brethren" in Jerusalem (11:1, 18).

Concerning the Antiochene clash of Paul and Peter that causes many scholars to view the portrait of apostolic harmony in Acts as tendentious,⁶⁵ it is vital to note that Paul's correction 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 (heterodoxy) but for acting in a way that is inconsistent with the gospel of justification by faith (heteropraxy), about which he and Peter shared a common understanding.⁶⁶ As well, given the two earlier meetings between Paul and Peter recorded in Galatians that demonstrate the agreement of the two apostles (1:18–24; 2:1–10), with the two missionaries entrusted with the same gospel, though having different target groups (Gentile/Jew; 2:7–9), the narrative about the Antioch incident implies that Peter accepted the rebuke handed out by Paul and brought his practice back into line with his own preaching.

At the council of Jerusalem, the danger of discord between the Pauline mission and the Jerusalem apostles is averted (15:1–21). 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).⁶⁷ 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).⁶⁸ Later in Acts, James and other Jerusalemite elders glorify God on hearing what God has done through Paul's Gentile mission

⁶⁴ See Coleman A. Baker, *Identity, Memory, and Narrative in Early Christianity: Peter, Paul, and Recategorization in the Book of Acts* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2011).

⁶⁵ For the history of research, see Andreas Wechsler, *Geschichtsbild und Apostelstreit: Eine forschungsgeschichtliche und exegetische Studie über den antiochenischen Zwischenfall (Gal 2, 11–14)* (BZNW 62; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1991). 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 New Testament: A Programmatic Essay," in *Rethinking the Unity and Reception of Luke and Acts* (ed. Andrew Gregory and C. Kavin Rowe; Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2010), 119–27.

⁶⁶ So also Bockmuehl, *Seeing the Word*, 131; idem, *Simon Peter in Scripture and Memory*, 94; 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; Lothar Wehr, *Petrus und Paulus—Kontrabanten und Partner: Die beiden Apostel im Spiegel des Neuen Testaments, der apostolischen Väter und früherer Zeugnisse ihrer Verehrung* (NTAbh NF 30; Münster: Aschendorff, 1996), 60–76.

⁶⁷ 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 *The Unity of Luke-Acts* (ed. J. Verheyden; BETL 142; Leuven: Peeters, 1999), 738.

⁶⁸ 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. Clark; 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: Apolllos, 2011), 188–89.

(21:20; cf. 11:18), 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).⁶⁹ What we find, therefore, is that throughout the book of Acts, the letter-writers of the NT cooperate together as those who have a common understanding of the gospel.

V. ANONYMITY

What are the hermeneutical implications of concealed authorship? Does it matter who wrote books that strictly speaking are anonymous? Regarding anonymity, this is not the simple concept that it is often assumed to be, for there are many possible reasons behind the phenomenon of an anonymous literary work.⁷⁰ Before the advent of printing there was no commercial gain or fame to be derived from being identified as the author of a work, and before the legal enforcement of copyright any possible gain or fame could not be protected. It is quite difficult for the contemporary reader to get behind this massive perceptual shift. Much literature before the invention of printing, namely up to and including the Middle Ages, was anonymous. The preservation and circulation of literary remains was in the hands of scribes and preserving the name of the author of the material they were transcribing was not always a scribal priority. According to Mullan, “The very word ‘anonymous,’ used to describe a literary text, dates only from the sixteenth century, as if it took print to make the absence of an author’s name an important fact.”⁷¹

In other words, it was print, and later (mid-sixteenth century) the currency of title pages, that brought anonymity to the notice of readers, such that it began to shape readerly perceptions. At this stage, the absence of an assigned author started to provoke readers to search for one and attempt an attribution. Indeed, it began to be viewed as the reader’s function to provide an attribution if one was lacking,⁷² so that “speculation about authorship was part of what it was to read,”⁷³ and “penetrating the mystery was one part of the pleasure of reading [a] book.”⁷⁴ Foucault observed, “Since literary anonymity is not tolerable, we can accept it only in the guise of an enigma.”⁷⁵ As noted by Mullan, only rarely is total and final concealment of the identity of an author the aim,⁷⁶ with efforts to discover the author being viewed a challenge laid down to the reader, and often clues are left by the au-

⁶⁹ Thompson, *One Lord, One People*, 161–62.

⁷⁰ John Mullan, *Anonymity: A Secret History of English Literature* (London: Faber & Faber, 2007), whose book considers some of these reasons, e.g. mischief, modesty, the author is of the *wrong* sex (whether male or female), danger, and confession. In what follows, I acknowledge my dependence upon Mullan’s study. Virginia Woolf in her essay, *A Room of One’s Own* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1929), wryly comments: “Indeed, I would venture a guess that Anon, who wrote so many poems without signing them, was often a woman” (p. 53).

⁷¹ Mullan, *Anonymity*, 296.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 5.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 13 (additions mine).

⁷⁵ Foucault, “What is an Author?,” 109–10.

⁷⁶ Mullan, *Anonymity*, 20.

thor for the thoughtful reader to find and make use of. In terms of the earlier Talmudic approach, according to Wyrick, “The Bible’s nature as a cryptic yet perfect document suggested that clues for this attribution might be found within the text itself.”⁷⁷ With regard to the Bible, and the NT in particular, a knowledge of these historical developments means that we need to handle the ancient phenomenon of anonymity with great care.

It appears that anonymity in Scripture is, at least in part, connected to genre. As is invariably the case for OT historical books (Genesis–Esther), the narrative books of the NT (the four Gospels and Acts) are anonymous. In the case of the NT letters, apart from Hebrews, all have authors attributed to them, as do most of the OT wisdom and prophetic books. As well, OT practice accords with what is found elsewhere in the ANE,⁷⁸ and Millard sees it as significant that the same type of compositions for which authors are named in Babylonia and Egypt also applied to OT literature,⁷⁹ so that, for instance, in Prov 1:1 Solomon is specified as an author or collector or both (cf. Sirach 50:27). OT prophetic books are named after the prophetic mouthpiece (e.g. Amos 1:1: “the words of Amos”). Joel P. Weinberg argues that the concept of authorship emerged in the ANE near the beginning of the first millennium BC, as demonstrated in Egyptian wisdom literature (e.g. The Instruction of Amen-em-ope), such that there is a distinct sense of conscious authorship.⁸⁰ He suggests that the concealment of the author’s name may have been a sort of game, a challenge to the intellect of the audience, requiring special effort, and Weinberg tries his skills on the books of Job (authored by Elihu?) and Ecclesiastes (by Zerubbabel?). The similarity of the pattern of anonymity versus attribution in OT and NT points to a generic connection and, according to Baum, NT practice is under the influence of the OT.⁸¹ This suggests that the anonymity of the four Gospels and Acts may be due to the intention of the authors that their books be seen as continuing the OT tradition of historical composition and that they stand alongside the OT as Scripture.

What is the reason for this generic differentiation? With regard to OT narrative, Meir Sternberg suggests that the biblical narrator’s self-effacing policy of ano-

⁷⁷ *Ascension of Authorship*, 80. For an evaluation of the rabbinic comments on the possible authors/editors of OT books in the *baraita* in *b. Baba Bathra* 14b–51a, see Michael W. Graves, “The Composition of the Book of Isaiah in Jewish Tradition,” in *Bind up the Testimony: Explorations of the Genesis of the Book of Isaiah* (ed. Daniel I. Block and Richard L. Schultz; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2015), 122–25. Graves concludes that the *baraita* reflects the Greco-Roman era’s interest in authorship and that the explanations are generated out of the biblical texts themselves; cf. Johannes Renger, “Authors: I. Ancient Orient and Egypt,” and Ulrich E. Schmitzer, “Authors: II. Classical Antiquity,” *BNP* 2:399–403. E.g. the ancient supposition about Homer’s blindness was deduced from the figure of the blind bard Demodocus (*The Odyssey*, Book VIII).

⁷⁸ See Allan Millard, “Authors, Books, and Readers in the Ancient World,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Biblical Studies* (ed. J. W. Rogerson and Judith M. Lieu; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 544–64.

⁷⁹ Millard, “Authors, Books, and Readers,” 555.

⁸⁰ “Authorship and Author in the Ancient Near East and in the Hebrew Bible,” *HS* 44 (2003): 157–69.

⁸¹ Baum, “Anonymity of the New Testament Books,” 127–31.

nymity serves the interests of authority, validating the credibility of the omniscient biblical narrator who provides a God-eyed view of events (similar to what only prophets can do but without claiming prophetic credentials).⁸² On the other hand, if the OT narrators represented institutional viewpoints (priesthood, court circle, scribal elite, or wealthy upper class), they were official spokespersons in that sense, so their individuality was irrelevant. In the case of the OT prophets, they were a *non-official* minority, whose mandate as individuals was supplied by a divine call, so the name of the divinely authorized organ of revelation was important. Baum postulates that the OT historians “presented themselves as rather insignificant mediators of the traditional material they passed on and by which in contrast they gave highest priority to their subject matter.”⁸³ He sees the same motivation at work in the practice of the NT authors of the Gospels and Acts, namely “to make the authors as invisible as possible and to highlight the priority of their subject matter.”⁸⁴ Along the same lines, Watson suggests: “No authorial persona is allowed to distract attention from him [Jesus]; gospel writing must be anonymous.”⁸⁵ According to Millard, “Authorship is necessarily admitted in letters and related to letters are prophetic communications,” for there is value in knowing which prophet’s words came true.⁸⁶ Likewise, though ancient Egyptian writing is largely anonymous, “The books for which authors are regularly named are the books of ‘wisdom,’ for effective instruction requires authority, and ‘wisdom’ requires personal authority.”⁸⁷ These are, of course, only attempted explanations after the fact (*post factum*), and it is by no means certain that any of these plausible theories is close to the mark.

VI. CONCLUSIONS

The attribution of authorship to a biblical book is hermeneutically relevant. To reiterate what is said above, this discussion is not to be construed as aimed at assessing the veracity of historical claims about authorship, though none of the traditional attributions is without warrant. Instead, it has sought to elucidate the interpretive effects of assigning the names of authors to the NT writings. Mark and Silvanus are significant connectors between Paul and Peter, just as Timothy is a link between Paul and the author of Hebrews. By means of the connection of Mark and Luke with Paul, the reader of the NT is led to expect that the teaching of the Pauline Corpus will be consistent with the presentation of the person and work of Christ in the Four Gospel Collection. The book of Acts depicts the partnership of Peter and John in gospel ministry and draws a picture of the harmonious relations between Paul and James. Indeed, Acts plays a key canonical role in displaying the

⁸² *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1985), 33, 71, 73, 124.

⁸³ Baum, “Anonymity of the New Testament Books,” 139.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 140; cf. Michael J. Kruger, *The Question of Canon: Challenging the Status Quo in the New Testament Debate* (Nottingham, UK: Apollos, 2013), 130–31.

⁸⁵ Watson, *Fourfold Gospel*, 13 (addition mine).

⁸⁶ Millard, “Authors, Books and Readers,” 544.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 550.

unity of the early Christian leaders (cum authors). The intention of this survey is not to deny or downplay the inherent variety in the NT witness to Christ but to show that the form of the NT bequeathed to us by early Christian readers affirms the compatibility of the different witnesses to Christ enshrined in the NT writings.