

## What's in a Name? Book Titles in the New Testament

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**Abstract:** This article follows up two earlier articles that surveyed Old Testament book titles. Four possible functions of a title have been differentiated by Gérard Genette, and these categories are used to analyse and interpret the assigned titles of the books of the New Testament. The post-authorial titles of the books of the New Testament are in effect a valuable but fallible commentary on the literary texts to which they are attached, constraining interpretation, sometimes in ways that are in tension with the texts themselves. Seeing that titles may guide or misguide readers, they require the critical attention of those who read and try to make sense of biblical texts..

TWO PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED ARTICLES devoted to book titles in the Old Testament are sufficient to show that the titles assigned to biblical books offer an interpretation of the books to which they are attached.<sup>1</sup> There are a number of possible functions of a title. According Gérard Genette,<sup>2</sup> one function is to identify or designate a literary work, another to indicate its general contents, a third to highlight it to the public, and a fourth to indicate its form or genre. Making use of the categories provided by Genette, this article surveys the titles assigned to the books of the New Testament and explores their hermeneutical implications.

### THE GOSPELS

From the outset let me make clear: this discussion of the titular labeling of the Gospels according to the names of their reputed authors (e.g. "The Gospel according to John") is not to be misconstrued as

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1. See Gregory Goswell, "What's in a Name? Book Titles in the Torah and Former Prophets", *Pacifica* 20/3 (October 2007) 262-77; "What's in a Name? Book Titles in the Later Prophets and Writings", *Pacifica* 21/1 (February 2008) 1-16.

2. "Structure and Functions of the Title in Literature", *Critical Inquiry* 14 (1988) 692-720.

arguing for or against any specific historical identification of the authors. That would require a strictly historical investigation, whereas the present discussion concerns the hermeneutical effects of attaching certain names (Matthew, Mark etc.) to literary works that are in fact anonymous.

In the light of this understanding we may say that the titles attached to the four Gospels provide hermeneutical direction to the reader. They do not use the term "gospel" as the name of a literary genre but identify each book as containing "the Gospel according to X", e.g. *euangelion kata Iōannēn* ("The Gospel according to John").<sup>3</sup> The form of the titles prompts the reader to view each book as one witness among others to the one "gospel", namely the proclamation of what God has done in and through Jesus Christ. The titular uniformity renders it highly unlikely that they were independently formulated by the Evangelists themselves.<sup>4</sup> As well, we could imagine, for example, that the writer of Luke's Gospel may not have entirely approved the title assigned his work, given that Luke 1:1-4 reads like an apology for the work compared to earlier attempts to write about the life of Jesus. It is not clear, however, that the author of the third Gospel intended to render obsolete earlier written records of the life and teaching of Jesus. His description of the work of his predecessors as an "attempt" (1:1 *epecheirēsen*) does not denigrate their efforts but simply points to the challenging nature of the task.<sup>5</sup> The only other implication to be drawn is that in what he himself wrote, the author of Luke's Gospel strove to do his best.<sup>6</sup> Accepting for the purposes of argument the chronological priority of Mark, the incorporation by the author of Matthew of most of the material of Mark's Gospel could indicate that he intended that his Gospel should supersede it. In the same way the very different approach of the Fourth Gospel compared to the Synoptics could be construed as an implicit critique of the other approach taken. We do not need,

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3. The *inscriptions* in Vaticanus and Sinaiticus are written by a second hand and contain the shorter form *kata Iōannēn* etc. (for details, see B. and K. Aland et al (eds.), *Novum Testamentum Graece* [27<sup>th</sup> Ed.; Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1993] 719, 721, 727, 732). Three older papyri display the long form of the titles, namely P<sup>66</sup> for John, P<sup>75</sup> for Luke and John, and P<sup>64</sup> for Matthew (NTC<sup>27</sup> 247). H. F. von Soden is not entirely correct, therefore, when he says that the overall tendency has been to expand rather than to abbreviate the titles (*Die Schriften des Neuen Testaments I. Teil Untersuchungen I. Abteilung die Textzeugen* [Berlin: Verlag von Arthur Glaue, 1902] 295, 297-99, 301-27).

4. The similarity also renders unlikely the view of Martin Hengel that the Gospels were given their titles *before* they were combined in the canon of the four Gospels (*Studies in the Gospel of Mark* [London: SCM, 1985] 64-84).

5. I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (NIGTC; Exeter: Paternoster, 1978) 41.

6. See Oscar Cullmann, "The Plurality of the Gospels as a Theological Problem in Antiquity", in A. J. B. Higgins (ed.), *The Early Church* (London: SCM, 1956) 43, 44.

however, to understand the titles as subverting the works to which they were later appended. The titles affixed to the Gospels, however, prevent the hegemony of any one Gospel over the other three. They instruct the reader that the four Gospels are not to be seen as rivals but as complementary.

The term “gospel” in Mark 1:1 is not a literary designation.<sup>7</sup> Rather, it appears to be saying, given the quotation from Isaiah 40:3,<sup>8</sup> that the gospel spoken by Isaiah (cf. Isa 52:7: “who brings good tidings” [LXX *euangelizomenou*]) is beginning to be fulfilled, first in the appearance of John the Baptist preaching about “he who comes after [him]” (Mark 1:7-8), and then in Jesus’ preaching of the nearness of the kingdom of God. It is perhaps a short step to calling documents that contain the gospel “Gospels”,<sup>9</sup> but it is a further step none the less.<sup>10</sup>

Let us consider the four Gospels in turn. Matthew is introduced as a “book” (1:1 *biblos*). The superscription, “The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham” (on analogy with Gen 5:1 LXX), may be intended to cover no more than the genealogy (Matt 1:2-17), and the repetition (in reverse order) in 1:2-17 of the triad of names found in the opening line could be construed as evidence for limiting the intent of the superscription to this: Abraham (1:2), David (1:6) and Jesus, who is called the Christ (1:16).<sup>11</sup> Davies and Allison, however, opt for the view of Matt 1:1 as the title for the entire gospel,<sup>12</sup> with the introductory use of *biblogenesēōs* (“The book of the genealogy”) intended to set the story of Jesus as a counterpart to another “history of origins”, the book of Genesis. If that is the intention, it signals that this book tells of the renewal of creation through the person and work of Jesus (cf. Matt 19:28 *palingenesia*). To reiterate a point already made, even in the case of Mark, where the word “gospel” occurs in the first line of the work, there is nothing to suggest that the Evangelist saw “gospel” (*euangelion*) as a literary designation. M. Eugene Boring argues that in the opening line of this discourse about

7. Helmut Koester, “From the Kerygma-Gospel to Written Gospels”, *NTS* 35 (1989) 361-81, see p. 370.

8. It is the Isaiah part of the composite quotation in Mark 1:2-3 that is highlighted: “As it is written in Isaiah the prophet”.

9. For evidence of its first uses as a literary designation, see Lee Martin McDonald, *The Biblical Canon: Its Origins, Transmission, and Authority* (Peabody MA: Hendrickson, 2007) 261, 262, 265, 337, 346.

10. See Denis Farkasfalvy, “The Apostolic Gospels in the Early Church: The Concept of Canon and the Formation of the Four-Gospel Canon”, in Craig Bartholomew et al (eds.), *Canon and Biblical Interpretation* (Scripture and Hermeneutics Series 7; Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2006) 111-122, who shows that this is no arbitrary shift in meaning.

11. As noted by W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, Jr., *The Gospel According to Saint Matthew, Volume 1* (ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988) 149.

12. Their reasons are given in *The Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, 150-54.

Jesus Christ, the author entitled it the *archē*, that is, it is the “rule” or “normative statement” for preaching the “gospel of Jesus Christ”, and as such the beginning and foundation for the church’s contemporary preaching of this message.<sup>13</sup> It is not clear, however, that the word can mean that.<sup>14</sup> The Gospel of Luke (and Acts for that matter) is designated a “narrative” (1:1 *diēgēsis*) giving an “orderly account” of the events that have taken place, namely what God began to do through Jesus and Jesus continued to do (through the apostles). The closest we come to a designation for the Fourth Gospel is the reference to the “testimony” to Jesus (John 21:24 *marturia*) made available to the readers through what is written. Rudolf Schnackenburg does not see the written form here called a “testimony”, rather the reliable testimony of the beloved disciple comes through what is written,<sup>15</sup> and Schnackenburg is probably correct in making such a distinction.

As for the names mentioned in each Gospel title, the texts of the books do not explicitly divulge the names of their authors, e.g. the Fourth Gospel does not disclose the name of “the beloved disciple” whose testimony that Gospel preserves (John 21:24). The names of John and his brother James are notably absent from the Fourth Gospel (though there is one mention of “the sons of Zebedee” in 21:2). On the other hand, Peter is called “Simon, son of John” (John 1:42; 21:15, 16, 17) – significantly in the final chapter when he is being compared and contrasted with the (still) unnamed “beloved disciple”. This could be viewed as hinting at the identity of “the beloved disciple”, who is identified as the source behind the Johannine tradition (but not necessarily the one who wrote the Gospel<sup>16</sup>).

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 9:9-13. The implication of the title, then, is that the book provides a firsthand account of many of the things narrated. In Mark and Luke it is not made clear that “Levi” who is 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 name Mark in the title of the Second Gospel recalls, possibly intentionally, the youthful resident of Jerusalem who bore that name (Acts 12:12) and who was the co-worker of Peter (1

13. “Mark 1:1-15 and the Beginning of the Gospel”, *Semeia* 52 (1990) 43-81, see p.53.

14. See G. Dellling, “*archō*”, in *TDNT*, 1.478-89.

15. *The Gospel according to John, Volume Three: Commentary on Chapters 13–21* (Tunbridge Wells, Kent: Burns & Oates, 1982) 373.

16. See Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to the Gospel of John* (edited, updated, introduced, and concluded by Francis J. Moloney; New York: Doubleday, 2003) 191-92, and the judicious comments by the editor on page 191, n.6.

Pet 5:13) and Paul (Acts 12:25; Col 4:10; Phlm 24; 2 Tim 4:11).<sup>17</sup> In this way, the name of Mark (once it was used in the assigned title of 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 New Testament. 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).<sup>18</sup> As well, the name of Luke is found in Col 4:14; 2 Tim 4:11 and Phlm 24. Thus the title of the Third Gospel makes a bridge between the Four-Gospel corpus and the Pauline letters. In so doing, it would seem to disallow any interpretation that views Paul as slighting the importance of the historical record of Jesus' life (cf. 2 Cor 5:16)<sup>19</sup> or as needlessly complicating or even corrupting the Gospel first proclaimed by Jesus. The author of the Fourth Gospel, named as John in the assigned title, also has to his credit three epistles (1, 2, 3 John) and the book of Revelation (cf. Rev 1:1, 4, 9),<sup>20</sup> and this is a further way in which Gospels and epistles are shown to be alternate mediums for the same message that centres on Jesus Christ. All in all, the titles of the four Gospels, incorporating as they do the names of their reputed authors, assist in giving the impression of the unity of the New Testament witness to Christ.

Each Evangelist wrote his composition as a stand-alone literary work depicting the life of Jesus Christ in distinctive ways. Redaction Criticism promoted the understanding that this was because each Evangelist wrote for a different audience, each of which had differing needs.<sup>21</sup> It is questionable, however, whether we can use the Gospels to build up a profile of specific communities to which they were written. What the

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17. This argument is not to be misconstrued as seeking to establish the historical veracity of the identification.

18. Though disputed, this is still the most likely explanation.

19. See the discussion of C. K. Barrett with reference to the Bultmannian school that saw Paul as having no interest in the "Jesus of history" (*The Second Epistle to the Corinthians* [Black's New Testament Commentaries; 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.; London: Adam & Charles Black, 1973] 171). Origen understood Paul in 2 Cor 8:18 to be referring to and commending Luke and his Gospel (Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 6.25.6).

20. The identification is favoured by the fact that there is no attempt to differentiate between these Johns in the titles, so that the (naive) reader is meant to assume their identity. The similar idioms used (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 (cf. 1:17; 2:23; 21:6; 22:13, 16) can be compared to those in the Fourth Gospel.

21. This understanding has recently been challenged: see the essays in the volume edited by Richard Bauckham, *The Gospels for All Christians: Rethinking the Gospel Audiences* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998). There are good grounds for supposing that the Gospels were written for a wide readership and not just for a particular community with peculiar needs. This volume makes no mention of the Gospel titles in the arguments marshalled.

four Gospels have in common is greater than their differences (which Redaction Criticism has perhaps overplayed). As part of the canonical process, all four Gospels were collected together and given the same *inscriptio*: "The Gospel according to X". Certainly the titles attached to each of the four make no mention of different addressees so that these books now function as the Gospel for God's people everywhere. This need not be viewed as a radically new function but (if we follow Bauckham) as confirmation of what they always were. The canonical designation given to each book ("The Gospel according to X") further suggests that each Evangelist writes from his own perspective so that the multifaceted story of Jesus would be incomplete if the other Gospels were excluded from consideration. All four Gospels are needed for a complete picture of the words and work of Jesus Christ. The titles assert that the exclusive use of any one of the four is illegitimate. The reader is warned against the danger of playing favourites.<sup>22</sup>

#### ACTS

Presumably, the author of Luke's Gospel intended his second volume to come under the designation "narrative" (Luke 1:1 *diēgēsis*) applied in the prologue to the first. The way in which Acts 1:1 connects this second volume with the former implies this. "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. 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).<sup>23</sup> Such a title would seem to be in tension with the book it heads. The name *praxeis* [tōn] *apostolōn*, or just *praxeis*,<sup>24</sup> is attested since the time of Clement of Alexandria and Irenaeus. The Muratorian Canon (line 34), consistent with its anti-Marcionite stance, calls it *acta omnium apostolorum* ("the acts of all the apostles"), for Paul is not the only apostle featured, and the other apostles are also accredited. Cyril of Jerusalem calls it "the Acts of the Twelve Apostles"<sup>25</sup> According to W. G. Kümmel,<sup>26</sup> the title "The Acts of the Apostles" is scarcely original and does not fit the

22. See Robert W. Wall, "The Problem of the Multiple Letter Canon of the New Testament", *HBT* 8 (1986) 1-31, especially pp. 4-5. I acknowledge my substantial dependence upon him for this and the following section.

23. F. F. Bruce, *Commentary on the Book of the Acts: The English Text with Introduction, Exposition and Notes* (Grand Rapids MI: Eerdmans, 1954) 17.

24. See NTG<sup>27</sup> 320, 735 for details.

25. *Catechetical Lectures* 4.36.

26. *Introduction to the New Testament* (tr. Howard Clark Kee; Revised Edition; London: SCM, 1975) 159, n.149.

contents of the book, for the apostles are not the main characters of the book.

All the apostles are named in chapter 1 and there is the expressed concern to make up the number of the Twelve after the death of Judas (1:15-26). Peter, James, John (up to the Jerusalem Conference in Acts 15, which is a major turning-point in the book) and especially Paul are prominent in Acts, but the other apostles as individuals receive no attention. Stephen and Philip (Acts 6-8) are not even apostles but nevertheless play an important role in preparing for the Gentile mission. The apostles as a group fade out of prominence (some of the last references being 9:27; 11:1; 15:2, 4). Peter is their usual spokesman, and the others have no voice. Barnabas and Paul are twice called "apostles" (14:4, 14), but in the restricted sense of church representatives.<sup>27</sup> No doubt the debate will continue over the purpose of Acts, but this must be resolved in some way around the purpose of the dominating presence of Paul within the book (especially in Acts 13-28), with due weight given to the extensive parallels between Paul and the Lukan Jesus (e.g. their final journey to and trials in Jerusalem).<sup>28</sup>

Further, as noted by David Trobisch,<sup>29</sup> "Acts" as a fourth function title (according to Genette's scheme) does not conform well to the ancient literary genre described as "Acts" (*praxeis*), 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*, *Acts of Peter*, *Acts of Andrew*, better conform to the genre.<sup>30</sup> 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 ill-fitting generic title turns the book into a celebration of apostolic achievements. In tension with such an orientation, the summaries scattered through Acts (e.g. 6:7; 9:31; 12:24) suggest that it chronicles the spread of the word to the seat of empire, Rome, with God having used different agents to bring this about. On the other hand, 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 New Testament materials.

The opening verses of Acts (1:1-2) summarise the scope and thrust of Luke's Gospel as "all that Jesus began (*ēxato*) both to do and to teach"

27. In 14:14 the order is "the apostles Barnabas and Paul", which can perhaps be taken as support for the interpretation suggested.

28. See A. J. Mattill, Jr., "The Jesus-Paul Parallels and the Purpose of Luke-Acts", *NovT* 17 (1975) 15-46.

29. *The First Edition of the New Testament* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) 39.

30. See E. Hennecke and W. Schneemelcher, *New Testament Apocrypha* (English translation edited by R. McL. Wilson; 2 vols.; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1964) 2.188-531.

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.<sup>31</sup> 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).<sup>32</sup> 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 “the Spirit of Jesus” (16:6, 7) and that he works mainly through Spirit-empowered messengers.

#### LETTERS

Each of the letters of the New Testament was written to address a certain audience concerning particular church problems. The “letter” of James is categorised in this way by the assigned title, but is generically more homily than letter.<sup>33</sup> There is, however, a salutation (“Greeting”) to diaspora Jewish-Christians in Jam 1:1,<sup>34</sup> so that it certainly purports to be a letter. 1 John is a written homily.<sup>35</sup> The same applies to the “epistle” to the Hebrews<sup>36</sup> (noting Heb 13:22: “my word of exhortation”; cf. the reference to the diaspora synagogue sermon of Paul and Barnabas in Acts 13:15), though Hebrews is not totally devoid of letter characteristics, e.g. the giving of news (13:23) and final greetings (13:24).<sup>37</sup> 1 John lacks major elements of an epistolary form (e.g. praescript and postscript), whereas 2 John and 3 John conform to the conventions of the

31. See C. K. Barrett, *The Acts of the Apostles: Volume I* (ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994) 66-7. The phraseology at the end of John's Gospel (21:25: “many other things that Jesus did” [*alla polla epoiēsen ho Iēsous*]) may be compared to Acts 1:1 (*hōn ērxato ho Iēsous poiein*).

32. 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.

33. This genre identification is preferable to that of paraenesis (that was popularized by the influential commentary by Martin Dibelius); see the discussion of Douglas J. Moo, *The Letter of James* (Pillar New Testament Commentary; Grand Rapids MI: Eerdmans, 2000) 8.

34. For the genre of James, see Karl-Wilhelm Niebuhr, “Der Jakobusbrief im Licht frühjüdischer Diasporabriefe”, *NTS* 44 (1998) 420-43. Niebuhr interprets James within the diaspora letter tradition of Jeremiah 29, the Epistle of Jeremiah, 2 Maccabees 1-2, and 2 Baruch 78-86.

35. However, see Fred O. Francis, “The Form and Function of the Opening and Closing Paragraphs of James and 1 John”, *ZNW* 61 (1970) 110-26.

36. It is called an epistle, for example by Clement of Alexandria, as quoted by Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 6.13.4-8; 6.14.1-3.

37. See James Swetnam, “On the Literary Genre of the ‘Epistle’ to the Hebrews”, *NovT* 11 (1969) 261-69.

ancient letter tradition.<sup>38</sup> 1 John is not, however, without epistolary characteristics, for there is the repeated “I write this to you” etc. (2:1, 7, 12, 21, 26; 5:13). The letter form of 1 Peter is manifest only at the beginning (1:1-2) and the end (5:12-14). Only the opening of 2 Peter sounds like the beginning of a letter (1:1-2), though later it makes the explicit claim to be such (3:1: “This is now the second letter that I have written to you”). Yet whatever the differences between these literary productions, their assigned titles designate each as a “letter” (*epistolē*), and this generic designation embodies a certain hermeneutical agenda. Those who affixed these titles understood a religious “letter” as written to provide practical remedy for pastoral problems.<sup>39</sup> The letter genre identifies problems afflicting churches and suggests ways to resolve them (as is plainly to be observed in the shorter letters to the churches in Revelation 2–3).

#### PAULINE EPISTLES

According to the assigned titles, the Pauline epistles all have the same principal author (Paul),<sup>40</sup> and so are named (and differentiated one from the other) according to whom they were addressed, e.g. Romans (*Pros Rhōmaious*), Corinthians (*Pros Korinthious*). This pattern requires Ephesians to be addressed to one particular church, even if, as the theory goes, it was once a circular letter.<sup>41</sup> At minimum this serves Genette’s first function, to identify or designate the works, differentiating them one from the other, for the different place designations in the titles suggest nothing about the contents of the different letters. At the same time, the names of the different churches in the titles are in

38. See Robert W. Funk, “The Form and Structure of II and III John”, *JBL* 86 (1967) 424-30.

39. Wall, “The Problem of the Multiple Letter Canon”, 4-5.

40. In this study, “Paul” is the name of the reputed author supplied in the epistolary titles and a character depicted in the book of Acts. I do not enter into the question of the historical authorship of the Pastoral Epistles and other letters often deemed Deutero-Pauline (Ephesians, Colossians, 2 Thessalonians), but for recent accounts of this debate, see Mark Harding, “Disputed and Undisputed Letters of Paul”, in Stanley E. Porter (ed.), *The Pauline Canon* (Pauline Studies 1; Leiden: Brill, 2004) 129-168, and I. Howard Marshall, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles* (ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991) 57-92. The focus of my discussion continues to be the hermeneutical effects of the post-authorial titles assigned to the literary works that make up the New Testament.

41. The *en Ephesō* (“in Ephesus”) of Eph 1:1 is absent from P<sup>46</sup>, a, and B; see Ernest Best, “Ephesians 1.1”, in Ernest Best and R. McL. Wilson (eds.), *Text and Interpretation: Studies in the New Testament Presented to Matthew Black* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979) 29-41. No named individuals are greeted in the letter. An example of the opposite text-critical move is the well-supported words “in Rome” (*en Rhōme*) in Rom 1:7 that are absent in a few less important witnesses (cf. Rom 1:15). This may reflect the view of copyists that Paul’s “treatise” was of more than local application.

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). These accounts provide the reader with background information about the churches that have letters addressed to them.

The titles of four Pauline letters classify them as addressed to individuals: 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus and Philemon. On the other hand, the instructions about the organisation of church life given by Paul in 1 Timothy and Titus, and the character of 2 Timothy as a "testament" of Paul, make their wider application obvious.<sup>42</sup> As well, the formality of the opening of the Pastoral Epistles (1 Tim 1:1; 2 Tim 1:1; Titus 1:1-3) suggests that Paul is in fact addressing church situations through his envoys, so that these letters are not so very different in character from those whose titles mark them as written to churches. This is confirmed by the use of second-person *plural* pronouns in final blessings ("Grace be with you [*hymōn*]") in 1 and 2 Timothy, with the addition of "all" in Titus ("Grace be with you all").<sup>43</sup> Similarly exclusive mention of Philemon in the title brings it into line with Paul's letters to Timothy and Titus, but an alternative and longer title would have been possible given that it was addressed not only to Philemon but also "to Apphia our sister and Archippus our fellow soldier, and the church in [Philemon's] house" (Phlm 2).

The title supplied to the anonymous book "To the Hebrews" (*Pros Hebraious*), whether originally it was written for a mixed audience or not, situates the book within Jewish Christianity.<sup>44</sup> It is thereby connected with the Catholic Letters (so-called) rather than with the Pauline Letters, seeing that Paul was entrusted with the gospel "to the uncircumcised" (Gal 2:7-9; Acts 9:15; 22:21; 26:17) rather than "to the circumcised", and indeed its position in modern printed editions (following the Vulgate order) is in front of the Catholic epistles. On the other hand, the title "To the Hebrews" is a connection to (other?) Pauline letters that name the letters by addressee, and separates it from the Catholic Epistles that are named by their authors. The letter does have specific referents (see Heb 10:32-4) but the details of their identity

42. The suggestion is that of N. A. Dahl, "The Particularity of the Pauline Epistles as a Problem in the Ancient Church", in *Neotestamentica et Patristica: Eine Freundesgabe Herrn Professor Dr. Oscar Cullmann zu seinem 60. Geburtstag Überreicht* (VTS 6; Leiden: Brill, 1962) 266.

43. James W. Aageson, "The Pastoral Epistles, Apostolic Authority, and the Development of the Pauline Scriptures", in Stanley E. Porter (ed.), *The Pauline Canon*, 8-9.

44. John Dunnill, *Covenant and Sacrifice in the Letter to the Hebrews* (SNTSMS 75; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992) 13-39.

and location remain vague. The addressees are not named “the Hebrews” within the book itself, so that the title appears to have been coined on analogy with the titles of the (other) Pauline letters. Therefore, according to Trobisch, the title of the anonymous Letter to the Hebrews implies the name of Paul.<sup>45</sup> Likewise, as noted by Trobisch,<sup>46</sup> the title of Second Corinthians represents a narrowing, in conformity to other Pauline titles, for it is addressed not only to the Corinthians but also to “all the saints who are in the whole of Achaia” (2 Cor 1:1). So too the letter to the “Galatians” is destined for more than one church (on the South Galatian theory, churches in the cities of Antioch of Pisidia, Iconium, Lystra, Derbe), for this is not a *city* name. What this shows is that the titles have been manipulated to gather the Pauline corpus together into letters to churches and letters of individuals. The titles need to come into consideration in the formulation of any theory as how and when the Pauline corpus was produced.<sup>47</sup>

Many of the epistles also in the course of time acquired subscriptions (*hypographai*) appended to the end of the books. These were originally brief but over time they were elaborated, e.g. the earliest subscription for Romans is simply *pros Rhōmaious* (“To the Romans”, α A B\* C D\*), and an example of a later elaboration is (*pros Rhōmaious egraphē apo Korinthou* (“To the Romans, written from Corinth”, B<sup>2b</sup> D<sup>b</sup>)).<sup>48</sup> The claims of the subscriptions are sometimes contradicted by the contents of the letters to which they are appended, e.g. some subscriptions to 1 Corinthians say that it was written from Philippi in Macedonia (yet 1 Cor 16:8, 19).<sup>49</sup>

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.<sup>50</sup> 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”). The noted presence of others (Rom 16:21) may also imply that they had some involvement in

45. *The First Edition of the New Testament*, 59.

46. *The First Edition of the New Testament*, 40.

47. On the different theories of the formation of the corpus of Pauline letters, see Stanley E. Porter, “When and How was the Pauline Canon Compiled? An Assessment of Theories”, in *The Pauline Canon*, 95-127.

48. Bruce M. Metzger provides information about these in *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (London: United Bible Societies, 1971) at the close of his notes on each epistle, and I am dependent upon him for this example. For Alexandrinus, see H. J. M. Milne and T. C. Skeat, *Scribes and Correctors of the Codex Sinaiticus* (London: British Museum, 1938) Plates 39-42.

49. See Metzger, *Textual Commentary*, 571.

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

the framing of the letter. 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. As well, most of his letters were coauthored:<sup>51</sup> 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), Phlm 1 (Paul and Timothy). By mentioning the name of one author (Paul) only, the titles imply that the teaching and instructions derive exclusively from one apostolic personality. 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).<sup>52</sup> Fuller titles would have encouraged a fruitful conversation between the Pauline and Petrine corpora (cf. 2 Pet 3:15, 16).

#### GENERAL EPISTLES

Seven epistles (James, 1, 2 Peter, 1, 2, 3 John and Jude) are grouped together under the title “Catholic Epistles” (*katholika*),<sup>53</sup> used in the sense of universal, reflecting the fact that (except for 2, 3 John) they are not addressed to any named church or individual, and so are named according to who *wrote* them. The lack of reference to any particular church in their titles, unlike in the case of the Pauline epistles, implies their universal application. This understanding is supported by the breadth of the readership addressed (e.g. Jam 1:1: “To the twelve tribes in the Dispersion”; 1 Pet 1:1: “To the exiles of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia”), though the addressees are not strictly without geographical limitation. The implication is that 2 Peter is written to the same wide readership as the first letter (3:1). James presents itself as an encyclical to Diaspora believers and that claim (according to Richard Bauckham) means resisting the tendency in some scholarly circles to envisage a specific “community of James”.<sup>54</sup> 1 John addresses a church where a group has seceded (see 1 John 2:19), but the error of those who departed is not clearly profiled. The secession is described as typical of “the last hour” (2:18) so that it is relevant to all

51. 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*, 153-158, esp. p. 154: “The practice of including others in the address as a ‘nicety’ is not supported by the evidence.” The named co-authors aided Paul in some way in writing the letters.

52. E. Randolph Richards, “Silvanus was not Peter’s Secretary: Theological Bias in Interpreting *dia Silouanou... egrapsa* in 1 Peter 5.12”, *JETS* 43/3 (2000) 417-32.

53. For details, see NTC<sup>27</sup> 588, 598, 608, 615, 625, 627, 628, 743-45.

54. John Court (ed.), *James: Wisdom of James, Disciple of Jesus the Sage* (New Testament Readings; London and New York: Routledge, 1999) 25-8.

churches, both present and future. As well, 1 John 2:19 alludes to more than a local dispute, given the generalising reference to “many antichrists” (2:18) and “many false prophets” (4:1; cf. 2 John 7 “many deceivers”). There is the danger of allowing a hypothetical construct to play too determinative a role in the exegesis of this letter. It would be a mistake to turn the whole letter into anti-secessionist polemic.<sup>55</sup> Indeed the lack of specifics facilitates its (now) general application within the corpus of Catholic Epistles.

The James and Jude in the titles are presumably the (half-)brothers of Jesus (cf. Mk 6.3), and this is corroborated by the authors’ self-reference not as apostles but as “servants” of Jesus Christ (Jam 1:1; Jude 1). Use of their names is another link between the epistles and the Gospels, and Acts (cf. Acts 1:12–14; 15:6–21). In this little corpus of seven books, 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 New Testament. Petrine authorship is claimed in 1 Pet 1:1, yet the letter also manifests connections with the Pauline circle in the persons of Silvanus and Mark mentioned in 5:12–13. There is likewise the approving mention of the writings of Paul in 2 Pet 3:15–16. Peter is thus a unifying link between different parts of the epistolary corpus of the New Testament.

#### REVELATION

The title “Revelation” (*Apokalypsis*; Vulgate *Apocalypsis*) is an incipit, taken from the first Greek word in the book (1:1: “The revelation of Jesus Christ”), with Rev 1:1–2 amounting to a superscription for the book. The sense of the opening words is that this writing contains “the revelation from Jesus Christ”,<sup>56</sup> who is the mediator of God’s revelation to believers. This title would appear to separate it from the letter category, even though it can be said to start with seven letters to churches (chapters 2–3). In Codex Sinaiticus and Codex Ephraemi the book is entitled “The Revelation of John” (*Apokalypsis Iōan[n]ou*), and this is the form found in the subscription in Alexandrinus, for John is the

55. See Hansjörg Schmid, “How to Read the First Epistle of John Non-Polemically”, *Biblica* 85 (2004) 24–41, for a survey and evaluation of previous work starting with that of Judith Lieu. Schmid then proposes his own non-polemical reading of 1 John, namely the apocalyptic context of the “opponents” motif, making that motif a standing reminder of the possibility of failure.

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

prophetic mouthpiece used by the Lord Jesus to speak to the churches (cf. 1:1: “which he made known to his servant John”). This simple title later received many additions and elaborations.<sup>57</sup> The title “Revelation” (or Apocalypse) was later viewed as a genre designation, and indeed it has given its name to a genre (Apocalyptic), but in the book itself this is the only time the term is used. John is not describing his composition as belonging to the literary type called “apocalypse”, nor does it appear that non-canonical apocalyptic works (mostly to be found in the Pseudepigrapha) are the context within which the writer wishes his own work to be interpreted.<sup>58</sup> It is likely that *apokalypsis* is an allusion to Daniel 2 (LXX/Theodotion),<sup>59</sup> wherein the verb *apokalypō* (“reveal”) is used up to six times. The writer of Revelation draws heavily upon Daniel as also upon other Old Testament prophetic works. Within the book itself, this writing of John is termed a prophecy (Rev 1:3: “the words of the prophecy”) and there is the similarly worded 22:7, 10, 18 (each reading: “the words of the prophecy of this book”) and 22:19 (“the words of the book of this prophecy”) that form an *inclusio* around the book as a whole. As well, the verb “to prophesy” (*prophēteuein*) is used in Rev 10:11 to describe the writer’s prophetic task: “Then I was told, ‘You must again prophesy about many peoples and nations and tongues and kings’”.<sup>60</sup> There is no actual quotation from the Old Testament prophets (nor of any Old Testament book for that matter), but prophetic images, allusions and phraseology form the warp and woof of the work.<sup>61</sup> The common title as an incipit is innocent enough, but it has often been understood in a way that obfuscates the book’s main connection, which is to Old Testament prophecy.

57. For details, see Bruce M. Metzger, *The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption and Restoration* (2<sup>nd</sup> Ed.; Oxford: Clarendon, 1968) 205.

58. A point made by Bruce W. Jones, “More about the Apocalypse as Apocalyptic”, *JBL* 87 (1968) 325-7, see p. 325, n.1.

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

60. See David Aune’s arguments in favour of the prophetic character of Revelation in *Prophecy in Early Christianity and the Ancient Mediterranean World* (Grand Rapids MI: Eerdmans, 1983) 274-88. Other passages of relevance to the evaluation of the author as a prophet include Rev 1:1, 10; 4:1-2; 17:3; 19:10; 21:10; 22:9. These refer either to his Spirit-endowment or to him under the title of “servant”.

61. See G. K. Beale, *John’s Use of the Old Testament in Revelation* (JSNTSup 166; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998); Barbara Aland et al (eds.), *The Greek New Testament* (4<sup>th</sup> Revised Edition; Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft/United Bible Societies, 2001) 891-901, esp. pp. 896-900 for allusions and verbal parallels of prophetic books in Revelation; H. B. Swete, *The Apocalypse of St John* (3<sup>rd</sup> Ed.; London: Macmillan, 1909) cxi-clviii, which identifies half the uses as from Psalms (27 times), Isaiah (46), Ezekiel (29) and Daniel (31) (p. cliii, n. 1). See Richard Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy: Studies on the Book of Revelation* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1993), wherein he argues that the book presents itself as the summation of the whole biblical tradition of prophecy (especially chapters 5 and 9).

## CONCLUSIONS

The material assembled demonstrates that a title implies an interpretation of the literary work that its heads. A title may throw light on a work or it may obscure its message. It is best to view the titles of the biblical books as valuable but fallible commentary on the text.

The following categorisation of New Testament book titles may be presented, paying attention to Genette's four functions that a title may fulfil. The basic (and minimal) function of identification of a book (and so also of differentiation of one book from another) is seen in the titles of the Pauline epistles, Romans, 1 Corinthians, etc. Even here, however, the titles also amount to cross-references to accounts given in Acts about the different churches that have letters written to them, accounts that invite their use as providing background to the individual letters. In practice, no biblical book title merely functions as an identification tag. The second function is to indicate a book's general contents, a function that has obvious hermeneutical implications. A title such as the Acts of the Apostles (whereas the book has a special interest in *one* apostle, Paul) is unfortunate, for it is in tension with the book's contents. In the New Testament there is no third function title (to highlight or recommend) in use. A fourth function is to indicate a book's genre, and titles such as Acts, the epistle of X, and Apocalypse (= Revelation) fall into this category. In each case they suggest a way of understanding the book so named, for example, "Acts", if a genre designation, misclassifies the book; the Petrine "letters" address problems in churches, but are really homiletical in character. Also "Apocalypse" implies that the study of other (largely inter-testamental) apocalyptic works is the key to its interpretation, whereas the book sees itself as standing in and the culmination of in the Old Testament prophetic tradition.