

Karl-Wilhelm Niebuhr
and Robert W. Wall

Editors

THE
CATHOLIC
EPISTLES &
APOSTOLIC
TRADITION

*A New Perspective on
James to Jude*

The Catholic Epistles and Apostolic Tradition

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Karl-Wilhelm Niebuhr

Robert W. Wall

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Dedicated to Professor Dr. Donald J. Verseput
(1952–2004)

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PART II

CATHOLIC EPISTLES AS A COLLECTION

CHAPTER 2

A UNIFYING THEOLOGY OF THE CATHOLIC EPISTLES

A Canonical Approach

Robert W. Wall

Introduction

This paper proposes an interpretive strategy by which the Catholic Epistles (CE) should be read together as a collection whose seven books are integral parts of a coherent theological whole. The perceived theological coherence of the CE is at odds with the modern critical assessment that underscores their literary, rhetorical, and theological diversity, and therefore their independence from each other, no matter what interpretive strategy is employed. Those who chase down the sources of theological beliefs submit theological definitions retrieved from different points of origin, where different authors respond to the spiritual crises of their different recipients, who are shaped within different social and religious worlds. On the exegetical landscape of modern biblical criticism, then, the theological diversity found within the CE corpus has been explained as the by-product of differing moments/places of origin and their respective trajectories/tradition histories.

Those who treat the CE as literary media do not disagree with this conclusion. Their own explanatory constructions, however, explicate the same theological diversity as the by-product of different genres, textual structures, or rhetorical patterns—regardless of who wrote these texts,

for whom, when, or where. In this light, then, the critical consensus is that the CE are no real collection at all, but an arbitrary grouping of literary miscellanea gathered together and arranged during the canonical process at a non-Pauline address, without any thought of their theological coherence or canonical function as a per se collection. In fact, the theological incoherence of the CE, and their independence from each other, has become a matter of critical dogma.¹

The present paper will incline the angle of approach toward the CE collection differently, thereby admitting into evidence new findings from the canonical period, when these seven books were formed into a second collection of letters “to provide a broader and more balanced literary representation of the apostolic witness than the letters of Paul furnished by themselves.”² In doing so, I intend to challenge the critical consensus regarding the theological incoherence of the CE collection; in fact, my thesis is that when this epistolary collection is rendered by the hermeneutics of the canonical process, both its theological coherence and its canonical role will be more clearly discerned.

At the center of this study are two related observations about the final redaction of the CE collection that are laden with hermeneutical promise. First, when the CE became a collection, the Letter of James became its frontispiece to introduce the deep logic—or what I call the *grammar*—of the collection’s unifying theology and its anticipated role within the biblical canon. Second, when the CE became a collection, it did so with Acts, which supplied a narrative context that not only vested the entire collection with religious authority but cued the priority of James within it. At that canonical moment, when the final redaction of this collection evoked a recognition of its theological wholeness, the one (James as its surprising frontispiece) was made explicable by the other (Acts as its narrative context).

A Canonical Approach to the Catholic Epistles as a Collection

The question is reasonably asked whether interpreters should elevate the importance of the canonizing community’s intentions when mining these texts for their theological material, especially when the modern bias is to define the theological goods of a biblical writing by those meanings retrieved from original locations or as envisaged by a composition’s rhetorical design and literary genre. I think so. In fact, if the angle of one’s approach to the theology of the CE is inclined by the relevant properties of the canonical process, then what should be assumed about these books are their theological coherence as a canonical collection and the importance of their collective role whenever the interpreter seeks to render a fully biblical witness to the word of God. In this portion of the paper,

let me simply catalogue those findings that are suggestive of a unifying theology and role of the CE collection.

1. I begin with the most basic of observations: the final redaction of the CE collection stabilizes a fluid movement within the bounds of the canonical process. This may be deduced from Eusebius' initial statements about the CE in *Ecclesiastical History*, and what he did and did not observe about received traditions at the outset of the fourth century. He notes, for example, the widespread acceptance and use of 1 Peter and 1 John in the ancient church—at least as early as Polycarp's use of 1 Peter in the early second century (*Hist. eccl.* 3.14)—but observes that other CE are disputed, mainly because of their lack of widespread use by the fathers of the church.³

The most important data in consideration of this phenomenon are the variety of canon lists preserved from both the East and the West, and the literature generated by the various theological debates and conciliar gatherings in these regions of the church.⁴ Depending upon one's account of the chronology of the canonical process, these data are retrieved from the second through the fourth century. To these data are added the quotations of and allusions to the CE found in early Christian writings—or the stunning lack thereof in some cases—which also span the canonical stage of Scripture's formation.⁵ Naturally, the sociology and hermeneutics of the canonical process, by which these data are contextualized and analyzed, could compel a different account of the performance and meaning of these texts than when they were first received by their original readers/auditors. But my principal observation is this: the CE collection did not stabilize until quite late in the canonical process, and the various internal changes that took place along its way to canonization, especially the placement of James as its frontispiece and its initial circulation with Acts as the collection's narrative (biographical) introduction, provide important clues to its theological contribution and continuing role within the biblical canon.⁶

Insofar as the formation of the CE collection occurs within the catholicizing milieu of the canonical process, its final redaction also reflects the general commitments of the canonical process itself. For example, the hermeneutics of the canonical process were not those of conflict but of consolidation, by which common ground rather than irreconcilable differences was sought. The theological perspicuity of every part of the whole was measured by an ecumenical *regula fidei* to ensure the unity of the canonical whole by this common theological referent.⁷ While critical exegesis of the seven-letter CE collection articulates the profound theological diversity across the biblical canon—a diversity that aptly reflects what might be found within the church catholic, ancient and

modern—the inclusion of each writing within the “catholic” collection of non-Pauline epistles, and this collection’s inclusion within the New Testament, assumes a general theological coherence to all other parts of the canonical whole, including the Pauline collection. I suspect this is exactly what Eusebius meant by the rubric *catholic*—*allgemeingültig* rather than *allgemein*—which would then be apropos of any other collection of biblical literature, not just this one.

2. At the same time, the final redaction of the CE collection was the by-product of an intentional movement. That is, its sevenfold shape does not appear to follow a mechanistic pattern of arrangement—for example, according to length,⁸ perceived date of composition,⁹ or as a matter largely determined by the print technology of a canonical edition in codex format.¹⁰ In fact, I am aware of no scholar who denies that the production of the New Testament served mostly religious aims, whether epistemic or sacramental. Thus, the different canon lists extant from different regions of the church catholic at the time of the canonical process reflect differing theological judgments made by ecclesial traditions that resulted in different groupings of writings, which were then ranked according to their importance when performing a variety of religious tasks (liturgical, educational, missional, etc.). The arrangement of these different collections, and even of individual writings within them, envisages ecclesial value judgments that reference Scripture’s canonical role in forming a community’s theological understanding of God, and its practical witness based upon those beliefs.

In this same manner, the emergent New Testament was edited over time into a final canonical edition by particular arrangement of its discrete collections, set in theologically suggestive relationships with each other, rather than by recognition of the importance of individual writings, one at a time. Individual writings did not circulate as such; rather, during the canonical process, individual writings were preserved, edited, reproduced, circulated, read, and then canonized in combination with other individual writings as canonical collections.¹¹ Indeed, the earliest history of the two epistolary collections would seem to indicate that they were placed side by side within the biblical canon to facilitate a constructive (“self-correcting and mutually informing”) conversation between them.¹²

3. In my recent study of the formation of the Pauline canon, I argue that the theological conception of the canonical Paul, articulated initially in a nine- or ten-letter corpus, was brought to its completion and “fixed” by the late addition of a small and marginal collection of three so-called Pastoral Epistles, probably toward the end of the second century. The methodological rubric I use in drafting this idea is the “aesthetic

principle,” by which I mean that the final redaction of the Pauline (and any biblical) collection became canonical precisely at the moment the faith community recognized the theological integrity or wholeness of a particular literary shape—in this case, the final grouping of thirteen Pauline letters, inclusive of the Pastoral Epistles. In this sense, the formation of a biblical collection might be studied as a phenomenon of the canonical process, which appears to follow a general pattern by which a fluid body of writings is finally stabilized, completed, and arranged by the addition (or subtraction) of certain writings. Moreover, the recognition of a collection’s canonical shape cannot somehow be abstracted from its performance in the formation and practice of Christian faith.¹³

By this same principle, then, the final shape of the CE collection, symbolized perhaps by its sevenfold membership (seven = wholeness), may satisfy an implicit aesthetic criterion by which this particular grouping of seven CE was stabilized, completed, and arranged as canonical upon the community’s recognition and religious experience of its theological wholeness. There are at least five properties inherent in the canonical redaction of the CE collection that would seem to envisage a motive to meet such a criterion, however implicit:

A. *James 2:22*. Without proposing a theory of the book’s composition as pseudepigraphy, I suggest that the eventual canonization of James accords with a theological judgment made about the canonical function of the CE collection as a whole (see below). Unlike the case for 2 Peter, which was added (and perhaps even composed) to extend the theological conception of 1 Peter, James was added to an emergent collection much later, probably toward the end of the third century, to help delimit its working relationship with a Pauline collection, which was already a fixed property within an otherwise still fluid biblical canon.

The catholic tendencies of the canonical redaction, by which an aesthetic of theological wholeness is pursued, are reflected by what is arguably the controlling text of the book’s famous essay on “faith and works,” James 2:22.¹⁴ Read canonically, this verse stipulates that “faith alone” (i.e., professed faith without works)—what had become the somewhat troubling hallmark of the Pauline tradition—cannot stand alone, but is rather “brought to completion by the works” (*ek tōn ergōn ē pistis eteleieōthē*)—a phrase that both captures the moral inclination of the entire CE collection and sounds a cautionary note that any reductionistic reading of the Pauline corpus may well degenerate into a *sola fideism*.¹⁵

B. *Second Peter 3:1-2*. At a relatively early and more fluid stage in the formation of the CE collection, 2 Peter was added to 1 Peter in order to complete a Petrine theological conception.¹⁶ Again without proposing a theory of 2 Peter’s composition as pseudepigraphy, whether as 2 Jude (as

critical orthodoxy would have it) or as 2 Peter (as the canonical redaction would have it), I contend that 2 Peter was added to the CE collection in light of its relationship to 1 Peter (rather than to Jude). The importance of this composition within Scripture, then, is as a “second letter” written “that you should remember the words spoken in the past” (3:1-2), in order to complete a more robust Petrine witness to better form the theological understanding of subsequent generations of believers.¹⁷

C. *Coherence of the three John epistles and the church’s recognition by the fourth century that the three form a discrete unit.*¹⁸ The intertextuality of the three Johannine letters is clear from even a cursory reading. My point again is that 2 John and 3 John bring to completion the theological conception introduced by 1 John. Painter’s recent commentary is helpful in this regard, not only by reading the three epistles together, but then by locating them within the CE collection and resisting the tendency to read them either as three bits of a New Testament Johannine corpus—an exegetical practice as early as Origen—or as a written response to problems created by the Fourth Gospel in a dialectical fashion that decidedly is not prompted by the final form of the New Testament canon itself.

D. *Jude’s placement within the Catholic Epistle collection.* Painter’s reading strategy agrees with the motive of the canonical redaction that places Jude between the three John letters and the Apocalypse. That is, as a canonical marker, the effect is to indicate that John’s letters are to be read together and within the CE collection, and not as members of a New Testament Johannine corpus.

It should be noted that the memorable benediction that concludes Jude (Jude 24-25), which some contend is reason alone for its preservation and canonization, is also a suitable ending to the entire collection, not because of its doxological argot but because of its practical interest in safeguarding those who might “stumble” into false teaching or immoral lifestyle (cf. Jude 4). Significantly, James concludes with a similar exhortation that to rescue believers who “stray from the truth” is to save their “souls from death” (Jas 5:19-20); and, in fact, this orientation to the congregation’s internal spiritual welfare will become an organizing thematic of the entire collection. Accordingly, then, Jude’s benediction, when reconsidered in the context of the final redaction of the CE, is apropos to the collection’s motive and role within the biblical canon.

E. *Jude and James*—books named after brothers of the Lord—form the literary brackets of the entire collection, thereby guaranteeing their religious authority and importance for the future of the church catholic. What must be said, however, is that the authority of this collection is due not only to its connection with the Jerusalem pillars, made famous by the book of Acts, but also to its connection to the Holy Family.¹⁹ The

importance of this relationship in the sociology of the canonical process has less to do with the hagiography of persons and more to do with the authoritative traditions linked to their names.

Each of these various properties of a final redaction evinces historical moves that in some sense complete and make more effective (with respect to the church's intentions for its Scripture) an earlier form of the collection. At different moments along the way and in different regions of the church catholic, 2 Peter, 2–3 John, and Jude were added as constitutive elements of a more theologically robust whole—a historical phenomenon that may reasonably be explained as evidence of the church's recognition of the importance of this second collection of letters within its biblical canon. Such an aesthetic principle is similar to that which measures the integrity of other biblical collections as well; in this sense, religious authority is a property of canonical collections rather than of individual writings. For example, the authority of 2 Peter is recognized in relationship to 1 Peter, or of James in relationship to the CE collection. A roughly parallel case is the fourfold Gospel, which Irenaeus said has an inherent integrity much like the “four corners of the earth,” and which, according to most canon lists of antiquity, is placed first within the New Testament to recommend its formative value, with Matthew's gospel typically given priority among the four as the most relevant continuation of Tanak's narrative of God's salvation.²⁰ That is, the theological integrity of the final redaction of a biblical collection—its placement with the New Testament—or even of an individual composition within the collection “signs” a role apropos to the motives of a biblical canon.

4. The question, when did the sevenfold CE collection become Scripture? appears related to the broad recognition that the Letter of James was necessary to complete the pages of a Peter-John epistolary catalogue.²¹ Perhaps the most decisive observation from a canonical perspective, then, is to discern the motive for this late inclusion of James, which may be properly assessed by its placement as the frontispiece in the collection's final redaction.²² While the fourfold Gospel and the thirteen-letter Pauline canon were almost certainly fixed by then, and probably Acts had emerged in its two different versions to perform a strategic role within the emergent New Testament canon,²³ the same cannot be said of the CE collection (or either Hebrews or John's Apocalypse).

That a grouping of non-Pauline letters from the two leading apostolic successors of Jesus—especially when read by the first half of Acts, where the story of their triumphant succession from the Lord is narrated—and his two brothers (see above) is formed to add to the biblical canon makes good sense, especially within a community that confesses its identity as a “holy apostolic church” and venerated the memory of the Holy Family.

Moreover, according to Acts, it is Peter who defends Paul's mission—even using Pauline terms in doing so (Acts 15:6-12)—before the leaders of the Jerusalem church led by James (cf. Acts 15:13-29; 21:19-26). It would seem reasonable, then, that the canonical process would delimit an epistolary collection to reflect their close working relationship, especially within a community in which the legacy of Paul had evidently triumphed, and thus within a canonical process for which the relevant question had become what literature should be read alongside Paul to enable the church to hear Paul's word more precisely and prevent its distortion. The book of James became the critical means to that end; but why?

Given the importance of James whose résumé includes founding and pastoring the Jerusalem church, the brother of Jesus, and an important leadership role in the missions of both Paul and Peter (cf. Gal 2:1-15; Acts 15:4-29; 21:17-25), the addition of a book in his name to the CE collection made good sense.²⁴ This very logic is evinced by Eusebius, who recalls the narrative of Hegesippus (*Hist. eccl.* 2.23.3-18) regarding the martyrdom of "James the Just (or 'Righteous One')" as testimony to his courageous fidelity and Jewish piety, and as the apparent reason why his "disputed" book should be included in the so-called Catholic collection (*Hist. eccl.* 2.23.25). While the connection between these traditions about the Jewish piety of James and his "catholic" letter appears to underwrite the authority of his "disputed" letter, my suspicion is that the canonical portrait of James found in the book of Acts (rather than those found in other noncanonical Jewish and gnostic writings) is more decisive for understanding the origins and ultimate canonization of the Letter of James.²⁵

It therefore remains a puzzlement for most scholars, especially given the evident importance of personal traditions about James reflected in canonical Acts, that no second- or third-century canon list mentions a letter from James and no Christian writer quotes from or clearly alludes to it.²⁶ While Origen is the first to mention the letter (*Comm. Matt.* 19.61),²⁷ neither he nor Eusebius seems familiar with its teaching; a generation later, Athanasius is the first to list it as canonical in his famous Easter letter of 367 CE, a verdict then confirmed by the Councils of Rome (382) and Carthage (397). Moreover, traditions about the legacy of James are pivotal to several writings outside the mainstream (Jewish Christian, gnostic), in which he is depicted as the pious pastor of the Jewish church and key strategist of the church's universal mission, in particular as the sometimes opponent of Paul's law-free mission to the nations. These same writings, however, do not refer to a letter, nor does their portrait of James explain the thematics found in the Letter of James.²⁸

Most explain this silence of an epistolary James by the sociology of a mainstream church, where the negative response to the anti-Pauline

bashing by the second-century tradents of James, and to their more “conservative” Jewish convictions and practices (and in some cases heretical inclinations), led to the letter’s suppression. Only later is this letter from James reclaimed, perhaps in edited form, and put back into circulation as suitable reading for the mainstream apostolic church. Yet the same could be said of the Pauline canon, which was also used by marginal and even heretical movements within the church, but which was already fixed by the end of the second century. The suppression of a letter from James also fails to explain why a similar silence is found in the literature of more marginal Jewish, Christian, and gnostic communities of the second century, for whom the legacy of James was valorized.²⁹ Again, the present paper offers no alternative theory of the origins and transmission of James in earliest Christianity; my thesis about the performance of James as the frontispiece of a canonical collection of CE does not depend upon a particular theory of its production.³⁰

5. If we can assume that the canonical redaction of the CE as an epistolary collection occurred in the fourth century, when a thirteen-letter Pauline canon was already in wide circulation and use, then its primary motive would likely have been to forge a more viable reading of the extant Pauline canon, to which this non-Pauline letter corpus was now added. In this sense, any new reading of the Pauline corpus would have been regulated by the teaching of the CE collection, thereby promising to prevent a distorted reading of the Pauline gospel within the church. Given the history of heretical currents emanating from Pauline traditions in the early church, one should not be surprised that a substantial Pauline criticism, an important hallmark of the James tradition within the early church (e.g., the *Pseudo-Clementines*, *Gospel of the Hebrews*), is largely retained in the Letter of James, especially (but not exclusively) in 1:22–2:26. Moreover, the Jewish roots of these traditions are hardly obscured in the letter.³¹ The viability of such an intracanonical conversation between Pauline and Catholic, then, would not rest on the prospect of conceptual harmony, but on a mutual criticism that does not subvert the purchase of the Pauline canon but rather ensures that its use by the church coheres to its own *regula fidei*.³²

By the same token, the internal calculus of the Catholic collection, consisting early on of letters from Peter and John—which, when viewed through the lens of Acts, merely supplement (rather than correct) the extant Pauline canon—now is transformed by the inclusion of James; the Peter-John grouping is recalibrated as a more functional Pauline criticism. The relationship between the Jerusalem Pillars and Paul, recalled from Galatians 2:1-15 and hinted at elsewhere in his letters and in Acts, is adapted to negotiate the relationship between the two epistolary corpora

within the biblical canon. The first element of a unifying theology of the CE is thus conceived in more functional terms. The reception of James cues the church's critical concern about a reductionistic use of Pauline tradition that edits out the church's Jewish legacy, especially an ethos that resists any attempt to divorce a profession of orthodox beliefs from an active obedience to God's law in a pattern of salvation (see below).³³

6. Trobisch's observation that the book of Acts played a strategic hermeneutical role in the canonical process is certainly correct. But the application of a reading of Acts as an "early catholic" narrative, written to moderate the conflict between Paul and the Jerusalem Pillars articulated in Galatians 2:1-15, to the canon project is mistaken in my view. I remain unconvinced that Acts is early catholic in either its theological or sociological sensibility; my primary concern is that this perspective undermines the special relationship between Acts and the CE collection evinced during the fourth century, when they circulated together and appeared together in the canon lists. Moreover, such a harmonistic reading of Acts fails to recognize the substantial role the James of Acts plays within the narrative world of Acts in moving the plotline of Paul's mission to the nations. In fact, my growing conviction is that the Acts narrative (rather than Galatians 2) best explains the importance of a final redaction of the CE collection that posits the Letter of James as its frontispiece, and therefore central to its theological definition and canonical responsibility, especially if Acts and James arrived together at this same canonical moment.

For this reason, the relevant question for my project is not the historian's, "Is the Letter of James a letter from James?" but rather is, "What does the James of Acts have to do with the Letter of James?" My suspicion is that the portrait of James in Acts not only underwrites the authority of a letter of James, but gives reason why it should function as frontispiece to a second corpus of letters when read as an element of a "self-correcting and mutually informing" conversation within the biblical canon.

The Role of Acts in the Final Redaction of the Catholic Epistles Collection

The Acts of the Apostles narrates a story whose central characters are the same authors (e.g., Peter, Paul, James) and audiences/sources (e.g., Jerusalem, Timothy, Corinth, Ephesus, Rome) referenced or alluded to in the subsequent New Testament letters (see chapter 7).³⁴ New Testament readers naturally make associations between these common elements, noting as well a common concern for important topics of Christian existence (e.g., sharing goods, purity, suffering, the performance of the word

of God, congregational unity). Literary intertexts of this sort suggest a logical relationship as members of the same conceptual universe; from a perspective within the New Testament, Acts supplies the “authorized” narrative behind its most important epistolary texts.

Considered from this angle, then, the critical orthodoxy of reading only the Pauline collection (Knox, Goodspeed, Bruce, Delatte, and many others) by Acts seems misplaced—even though the rehabilitation of Acts (perhaps even in a “new and improved” version) during the second half of the second century, and then a renewed interest in Acts criticism during the second half of the twentieth century, may well have been prompted by the evidently strategic relationship between the Paul of Acts and certain Pauline letters (e.g., Romans, Ephesians, Galatians).³⁵ During the canonical process, Acts came to supply a narrative introduction for the entire epistolary canon, Pauline and Catholic; in fact, from a canonical perspective, the relationship between Acts and the CE is elevated in importance because they “came into life” together during the canonical process. In any case, the interpreter approaches the New Testament letters with the orienting concerns of Acts in mind and, in light of its story, more wakeful when negotiating between the New Testament’s two different epistolary corpora as theological complements.

Given the reemergence of Acts as a text of strategic importance for underwriting the hermeneutics of the canonical process, I consider it highly likely that its narrative portraits of the church’s earliest leaders (i.e., Peter and John, Paul, and James)—drawn as they are from early traditions of their teachings and ministries, concurrent to the earliest stage of the canonical process—envisage a particular account of their religious authority,³⁶ the nature of their ministries (e.g., prophetic, pastoral, missionary), and the subject matter of their kerygmata, which supplied the canonizing community with both an explanatory context and a religious warrant for why these New Testament writings, when considered together, are formative of Christian theological understanding.³⁷ I especially think Acts provided the impetus for the circulation (and perhaps even composition) of James, which led to the formation of a “pillars” collection.

In particular, the manner by which Acts narrates the personae of Christian leaders and their relations with each other as characters of this authorized story of emergent Christianity frames a particular account of how “intracanonial conversations” between the canonical writings linked to these same leaders might be negotiated. Similarities and dissimilarities in emphasis and theological conception found when comparing the Catholic and Pauline letters may actually correspond to the manner by which Acts narrates the negotiations between the reports from different

missions, and of the theological convictions and social conventions required by each (e.g., Acts 2:42-47; 9:15-16; 11:1-18; 12:17; 15:129; 21:17-26). The relations between Peter and Paul, Paul and James, James and Peter or even Peter and John as depicted within the narrative world of Acts are generally collaborative rather than adversarial and frame the interpreter's approach to their biblical writings as essentially complementary (even though certainly not uniform and sometimes in conflict) in both meaning and function. In fact, if the critical consensus for a late first-century date of Acts is accepted, which is roughly contemporaneous with the earliest moment of the canonical process,³⁸ then it is likely that this collection of portraits of early Christian leaders provides an important explanatory model for assessing the relationship between (and even within) the two emergent collections of canonical letters: the form and function of these Christian writings and their relationship to each other is another articulation of the early church's "sense" of the more collaborative relationship between their individual people and interpretative traditions, which is reflected then in the Book of Acts. So that, for example, if Peter and John are enjoined as partners in Acts, then we should expect to find their written traditions conjoined in an emergent Christian Bible, and that their intracanonical relation envisages the church's perception of their theological coherence. Likewise, the more difficult although finally collegial relationship between James and Paul as narrated in Acts 15 and (especially) 21 may well envisage their partnership in ecclesial formation in a manner that Protestant interpretation has sometimes subverted.

Because both the narrative world and its central characters are the literary constructions of the storyteller and are shaped by his theological commitments, the interpreter should not expect a more precise connection between, for example, the kerygma of the Peter of Acts and a Petrine theology envisaged by 1-2 Peter. Nevertheless, there is evidence that Luke did indeed draw upon important traditions common to the Petrine letters when composing his narrative of the person and work of Peter. In particular, 1 Peter's interpretation of Jesus as Isaiah's "Servant of God" (1 Pet 2:21-25; cf. 1:10-12), the evident core of Petrine christology, is anticipated by four references to Jesus as "servant" in Acts (and only there in the NT), the first two in speeches by Peter (3:13, 26) and the last two in a prayer by the apostles led by him (4:27, 30).³⁹ Moreover, the God of the Petrine epistles, who is known primarily through Jesus' resurrection (1 Pet 1:3, 21; 3:21; cf. Acts 2:22-36) and as a "faithful Creator" (1 Pet 4:19; cf. Acts 4:24), agrees generally with Luke's traditions of a Petrine kerygma. Even Peter's claim that the central mark of Gentile conversion is a "purity of heart" (Acts 15:9) is strikingly similar to 1 Peter 1:22. Finally, the most robust eschatology found in Acts, famous for its

sparseness of eschatological thought, is placed on Peter's lips (Acts 3:20-23), thereby anticipating the keen stress posited on salvation's apocalypse in 1-2 Peter (cf. 2 Pet 3:1-13).⁴⁰ A second example may be the far thinner portrait of John in Acts, who although depicted as Peter's silent partner uses his one speaking role in Acts 4:19-20 to sound a key note of the Johannine epistles: ". . . for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard" (cf. 1 John 1:1-3).⁴¹

When these thematic connections are rooted in the narrative world of Acts—a world in which these characters have enormous religious authority and purchase for the church's future—the epistolary expression and development of these core themes is underwritten as also important for the church's future and formation. Moreover, the certain impression of kerygmatic continuity between the Lord's apostolic successors (Peter/John) and Paul, cultivated by Acts, would seem to commend a more constructive relationship between their writings. Acts performs an interpretive role, not so much to temper the diversity envisaged by the two different collections of letters but to prompt impressions of their rhetorical relationship within the New Testament. According to Acts, the church that claims its continuity with the first apostles tolerates a rich pluralism even as the apostles do within Luke's narrative world, although not without controversy and confusion. What is achieved at the pivotal Jerusalem Council (Acts 15) is confirmation of a kind of theological understanding rather than a more political theological consensus. The divine revelation given to the apostles according to Acts forms a "pluralizing monotheism" (J. A. Sanders) which in turn contextualizes Paul's idiom of two discrete missions and appropriate proclamations, Jewish and Gentile, in Galatians 2:7-10. The variety of theological controversies Paul responds to in his letters, with whatever rhetoric he employs in doing so, is roughly analogous to the "Cornelius problem" in Acts.

Of course, Acts portrays Peter (rather than Paul) as first initiating and then explaining the admission of uncircumcised (i.e., unclean) Gentiles into the church; the Peter of Acts finally defends Paul's mission and its spiritual results in a speech that is remarkably Pauline in theological sensibility (15:7-11)—perhaps reflective of Luke's familiarity with and perceived unity of the Petrine and Pauline traditions used in Pauline/Petrine letters, as many modern interpreters have noted.⁴² More remarkably, however, the question of whether or not to "Judaize" repentant Gentiles is settled *before* Paul comes back into the narrative to begin his mission to the nations in Acts 11:1-18. In fact, Peter's second rehearsal of Cornelius' repentance at this "second" Jerusalem Council responds to a different problem altogether, posed by the church's Pharisaic contingent that is concerned (as evidently is James) about a normative halakah for

mixed Christian congregations (15:4-5). Peter's response concentrates—presumably agreeing with Paul's initial proclamation (cf. 13:38-39)—on an internal “purity of the heart” (15:9).

James, however, expands this Pharisaic concern for religious purity to include socio-religious *practices* (15:20); in fact, his halakah reflects the more “traditional” worry of Jewish religion regarding syncretism—the “gentilizing” of repentant Israel (15:20; see also 21:17-26)—and in particular the possible attenuation of the church's Jewish legacy in the Diaspora as Paul's mission to the nations takes the word of God farther from Jerusalem, the epicenter of the sacred universe (15:21). It is in response to James' Jewish concerns that the narrative of Paul's mission to the nations is shaped in Acts; and, therefore, he provokes and responds to a different set of theological controversies than does the epistolary Paul who responds to internal opponents who want “to judaize” repentant Gentiles. According to Acts, this issue is settled by Peter at the earlier Jerusalem council (11:1-18), and even though this issue resurfaces in Antioch (15:1-2) those who raise the question again are summarily dismissed by James as “unauthorized” teachers who do not represent the position of the Judean church (so 15:24). In fact, the *entire* narrative of Paul's European mission in Acts (Philippian, Thessalonian-Athenian, Corinthian, Ephesian) is simply not shaped by the same theological controversies that Paul stakes out in his letters as provoked by his Gentile mission.

In general, the Paul of Acts is exemplary of a more Jewish definition of purity (cf. 24:16-21). Thus, he is arrested in Philippi for being a Jew (16:20-21) and earlier circumcises Timothy (16:3; cf. Gal 2:3!), not only to testify to his personal loyalty to the ancestral religion (cf. 21:23-26) but more critically to symbolize the importance of James' concern to preserve it in consecrated form. Consider, for example, the role Timothy performs in Acts in contrast to Titus in Galatians. Timothy is of mixed parentage, Jewish and Gentile, and in prospect of the Diaspora church, Paul circumcises him in order to preserve his mother's Jewish inheritance.⁴³ He stands as a symbol of Paul's missiological intent in Acts, which is to found Christian congregations in the Diaspora with a mixture of Jewish and Gentile converts but whose faith and practices are deeply rooted in the church's Jewish legacy.

From this canonical perspective, then, it may well be argued that a principal concern of the *second* collection of epistles is to bring balance to a *Tendenz* toward religious syncretism by which the pressures of the surrounding pagan culture may distort if not then subvert the church's substantially Jewish theological and cultural legacy. The repetition of familiar Pauline themes in the CE problematizes them, but acquires a thickened meaning when read in context of the antecedent Acts narrative;

that is, a prior reading of Acts alerts the reader of the CE that an increasingly Gentile (Pauline) church must consider its religious and public purity as God's people according to the redemptive calculus of their Jewish canonical heritage (Scriptures, practices, prophetic exemplars, etc.). As such, a Christian congregation's profession of faith must be embodied in its public and internal practices, in keeping with the ethos of its Jewish legacy.⁴⁴ The full experience of God's righteousness is achieved by performance of works pleasing to God and neighbor, and not merely by *sola fide*, no matter how orthodox or sincerely confessed.

A Grammar for a Unifying Theology of the Catholic Epistles Collection: A Proposal

The surprising priority of the Letter of James, indicated by its placement as the frontispiece in the final form of the CE, insinuates its strategic rhetorical purpose upon the entire collection. The typical rhetorical role of a frontispiece within any literary collection is to make introductions; as a theological introduction, James could be read as putting into play a variety of distinctive themes, whose linguistic and conceptual similarity with other CE may reasonably be explained as the sharing of common traditions, albeit from different regions and for different ends (see, e.g., Konradt).⁴⁵ These thematic agreements could then be pressed into service as the rubrics for a "unifying theology of the CE" (see, e.g., Schlosser). Such a unity, however, strikes me as somewhat artificial, since the mere sum of their linguistic or conceptual similarity does not necessarily envisage a coherent understanding of Christian faith. A more robust unifying theology requires a grammar that supplies a kind of logic by which the collection's thematic agreements cohere together to form a distinctive, decisive whole greater than the sum of its theological bits. The principal rhetorical role of the Letter of James is to provide such a grammar.

First stated in general terms, the subject of this grammar, articulated succinctly by James 2:22, is that a congregation's profession of faith in God (2:19a) is "made complete" by its obedience to God's "perfect law of liberty" (1:25; 2:12). Such acts of obedience are the criteria of friendship with God (2:24; cf. 2:8) and ensure the believer's eternal life with God (1:12; cf. 2:5). The collection's thematic agreements, then, cohere together as the predicates of this subject matter in stipulating a non-Pauline (rather than anti-Pauline) pattern of salvation that centers a congregation of believers (rather than a "world" of sinners) upon the performance of those works consistent with God's law (1:22-27; 4:4-17). By embodying devotion to God by observance of Torah's commands, the

theological grammar introduced by James is the complement of (rather than the counterpoint to) Paul's more missional subject matter that sinners are initiated into life with God by their public profession of faith ("with their lips") that "Jesus is Lord" (Rom 10:9). The effective result of their interplay within the biblical canon, Pauline and non-Pauline, aims at a more robust expression of God's gospel that lies at the heart of the canonical process.

The shift of rubrics from Catholic to non-Pauline in the above summary is intended to underscore the potential of my earlier observation that when the final redaction of the CE collection occurred, the canonical Paul (i.e., the Paul of Acts and the Pauline epistolary corpus) was already in place. It is reasonable to presume, then, that the formation of the CE collection had the Pauline collection in view all along—to "make complete" a Pauline understanding of the faith (par. Jas 2:22). Understood from this new perspective, the formation of the CE into a collection reflects the catholicizing hermeneutics of the canonical process, by which the completion of a non-Pauline collection glosses the Pauline to complete the epistolary whole—a whole that instructs biblical readers regarding a pattern of salvation that concerns both the sinner's initiation into life with God and the believer's ongoing friendship with God. In fact, when considered holistically, it should be apparent to the reader that either epistolary grammar, Pauline or Catholic, when appropriated to the exclusion of the other will ultimately subvert the formation of Christian faith and life, which is the principal purpose of the biblical canon.

Moreover, the emergent role of the book of Acts to mediate these two epistolary corpora within the biblical canon must be regarded as an important factor of this new perspective as well. Quite apart from the importance of traditions about the historical James as a Christian leader, the brother of Jesus, and as exemplar of Jewish piety, it is the canonical James of Acts that makes the strategic importance of the epistolary James explicable. Sharply put, James' speech found in Acts 15:12-21 (22-29) and its narrative recapitulation in 21:21-25 underwrite the theological grammar of the epistolary James.

While my recent commentary on Acts provides an exposition of these texts within their historical, theological, and narrative settings, in defense of the thesis of this paper, let me simply say that James expresses a profoundly "Jewish" anxiety over Paul's mission to the nations: that the church's social identity, which is marked out by traditional Jewish purity practices, might be threatened by the church's mission to pagans. James' agenda is both pastoral ("table fellowship" between repentant Jews and Gentiles) and articulates an ethical interest in the church's mission with virtually no apparent interest in the publicly professed beliefs of Pauline

orthodoxy. While he tacitly agrees with Peter's Paulinism that the purity of unclean (uncircumcised) Gentiles (e.g., Cornelius) originates from the inward affections of "hearts made pure by faith" (15:9, 19; cf. Jas 1:13-15), his midrash on the quoted prophecy from LXX Amos 9 (15:16-18) glosses this inward form of purity: those Gentiles who turn to the God of Israel by faith must nonetheless mind the Diaspora synagogue's teaching of Moses, specifically as it delineates the cleansing that is necessary for fellowship with Jews (15:19-21). Even though James agrees with Peter (who speaks for the Pauline tradition) that the pagan is initiated into life with God through faith (15:13-14, 19), he also seems aware that Peter's witness proffers an incomplete response to the important question earlier raised by faithful Pharisees regarding the halakah of a mixed Christian congregation in the Diaspora (15:5). The subtext of their question, which had become relevant to Luke's church, concerns whether the Jewish legacy should continue to define the church's religious identity in terms of those public purity practices in keeping with God's Torah, according to which fellowship with God and within a mixed congregation is possible (15:20, 29; cf. Jas 1:22-27; 2:8-13).⁴⁶ In fact, the James of Acts extends a Pauline understanding of the inward "purity (circumcision) of the heart" vocalized by Peter (15:8-11) to include social practices (including circumcision in Acts 16:1-3); this concern of James then controls the plotline of Paul's European mission in Acts 16-20.

Before moving to an initial draft of my proposal, let me express two caveats pertaining to the larger project of constructing a unifying theology of the CE. First, while many critics have noted the anti-Pauline note sounded by James, the Pauline cast of 1 Peter, and the non-Pauline (or Johannine) perspective of the Johannine letters, this approach to the CE as a discrete biblical collection, read by the theological grammar of James, regulates (and transforms) how their intracanonical relationships with the Pauline corpus (and every other biblical collection) are assessed.

Second, as a convention of the early Catholic Church, the canonical process gathered together diverse writings into collections whose roles and subject matter are consistent with the theological agreements and purpose of the *regula fidei*; the hermeneutics of the canonical process were of coherence, not dissonance. In this sense, the biblical theologian should presume that a unifying theology of the CE collection, and its ongoing performance in constructing a fully biblical theology, is rendered coherent by the rule's own grammar of theological agreements.

Of course, the same can be assumed of every other canonical collection, since the whole of Scripture is a literary analogue of this Rule. On this basis, for example, I submit that the internal structure and deep logic of a unifying theology of all Scripture must reflect precisely the church's

regula fidei. Moreover, it is precisely because the theological grammar would be the same when rendering every part of the whole canon that the biblical theologian is able to assess more adequately the distinctive contribution each makes to the whole, and what the whole would lack if constructed in absence of every part—whether a rendering of the theological subject matter of the New Testament in absence of the Old Testament, or of the Gospel in absence of the Letters, or of the Pauline Letters in absence of the CE. But this is a much more ambitious project for another Colloquium Biblicum Lovaniense.

To conclude the present study, then, let me briefly discuss the following sequence of themes as the constitutive predicates of a unifying theology of the CE collection, which are introduced and logically rendered by the Letter of James as the framework for a distinctive articulation of the Christian faith.

1. Human suffering tests the faith community's love for God.
2. In response to the suffering of God's people, God discloses a "word of truth" to map the only way of salvation.
3. In obedience to this word, the community must practice "pure and undefiled" behavior as the public mark of friendship with God.
4. Theological orthodoxy by itself is inconclusive of friendship with God and is made effective only when embodied in loving works.
5. Finally, the reward for steadfast obedience to God's word is eternal life with God.

1. *Human suffering tests the faith community's love for God.* According to James, the principal threat to Christian existence is the suffering provoked by "various trials" (1:2), which are not caused by God (1:13-16) and evidently are inherent in a chaotic, demonic "world" (1:27b; 3:6, 15-16). The theological crisis addressed by James is not sociological—it is neither the congregation's poverty nor its sense of political powerlessness (2:2-4; 5:1-6) as a dislocated people (1:1). Rather, the principal threat addressed concerns a testing of faith in/love for God that has been occasioned by their difficult social circumstances (1:3-8, 12).

While the prospect of doubt (1:6-8; 3:9-10; 4:8), theological deception (1:13-16), broken relationships (2:2-3; 3:9-16; 4:1-2), and even spiritual disaffection (5:19-20) is occasioned by social conflicts of one kind or another, its principal source is inward and deeply spiritual: a human soul inclined toward doubting God's generosity (1:13-18) and even toward "friendship with the world" rather than with God (4:4-5; cf. 2:21-24; 3:5-

6, 9-12; 4:6-10, 11-12, 13-17; 5:1-6). That is, the problem of suffering is its potential to erode a community's love for God.

The most evident mark of a community's spiritual failure, according to James, is the interpersonal strife within the faith community (2:14-17; 3:6; 4:1-3) and the attenuation of "loving neighbors," which is the essential ethos of God's people in contrempts to the world order (1:26-27; 2:1-13). While James casts the problem of theodicy in terms of human suffering, the relevant issue addressed is not so much a faithful God's relation to suffering (1:13-18) but rather the community's own faithful response to God in the face of their "various trials." James introduces a highly nuanced conception of *Leidenstheolog*⁴⁷ then, in that a definition of Christian existence is not concentrated by an experience of suffering but by the spiritual test it occasions. Further, while the community's suffering is provoked by popular opposition (2:6-7) and expressed as verbal slander (3:7-8), James finally casts spiritual testing in more cosmic terms, since creation itself is being contested by "the devil" (3:6, 9-12; 4:4-5), who is in the midst of it all (4:7-10).

Petrine letters. Even without using James to decipher 1 Peter's theological conception, the reader will find the thematic of suffering believers featured in this CE; in fact, the vocabulary of 1 Peter employs more "suffering" words than any other New Testament letter. Their suffering is the consequence of living as "strangers and aliens," both socially and religiously, within pagan society (2:11-12).⁴⁸ As in James, suffering appears to be more that of verbal slander, economic poverty, and political powerlessness than of physical abuse. Unwarranted suffering, which typifies the ideal reader of 1 Peter, is the ironic result of "good behavior" (i.e., obedience to God), probably because such behavior is considered odd by the moral standards of an ignorant society (3:13-17; 4:1-6).

When compared to James, 1 Peter pays more attention to the community's relationship with hostile outsiders than to the effects of suffering on relations within the community itself; yet, as in James, 1 Peter interprets suffering as a spiritual test (1:6) that prompts God's judgment of the community's continued identity as God's elect (1:2; 2:4-10), and as proof of its salvation (1:7-9), which is predicated on its obedience to God's word in the face of hostile opposition (1:17; 4:12-19).

Christ plays an important role as God's "suffering Servant" in 1 Peter's conception of human suffering. This christological justification is lacking in James, and 1 Peter's gloss thereby adds significantly to how the collection as a whole addresses the theological crisis occasioned by human suffering. The suffering of an obedient Christ is both the medium of God's salvation (1:18-19; 2:22-24; 3:18; 4:13) and exemplary of the congregation's identity in the world (2:21; 3:17-18); in this regard, Christian

existence implies a sharing in Christ's suffering in both soteriological and moral senses.

The implied audience of 2 Peter, which does not speak of suffering, appears to be more a stable household, and surely lives in a different symbolic universe than the audience addressed by 1 Peter. The theological crisis of 2 Peter concerns an internal challenge to apostolic traditions that otherwise define the community's orthodoxy. Second Peter insists that what is taught, whether or not it is right, determines how life is lived, whether or not it is righteous (2:18-21). When 1 Peter and 2 Peter are studied together as integral parts of the collection's Petrine witness, the biblical reader is reminded that the spiritual failure most often provoked by suffering is to compromise or attenuate the community's core beliefs as a strategy for avoiding the very hostility generative of suffering. Typically, orthodoxy is the first casualty of hardship (see Jas 1:13-16).

Johannine letters. While the Johannine letters agree that the surety of the congregation's devotion to God will be tested, whether or not every professing believer is truly a child of God, the language of suffering is notably absent. Nonetheless, Painter is correct when pointing out that "the purpose of 1 John is to address the confusion and heal the trauma caused by [the departure of schismatics who were, until recently, members of the Johannine community]."⁴⁹ The community's solidarity remains the central aim of these letters and is threatened not so much by external pressures exerted by outsiders (religious or secular) but by "Christian" opponents—"anti-christs" (2:18-22; 2 John 6-7)—whose conception of gospel truth is at odds with apostolic traditions about Jesus, the "word of life" (1:1-4). The result is the corollary of the Petrine witness: hardship is the first casualty of heterodoxy.

More critically, this intramural conflict has evidently had a pervasively negative (divisive) effect upon the community's life together, and has occasioned a spiritual test—what Robert Law long ago called "the tests of life."⁵⁰ But while the spiritual test concerns false teaching, its principal effect is moral. That is, the spiritual test concerns how to live a life of loving others; in fact, there is no gap whatsoever between knowing God's word, disclosed in the life of Jesus (2:6), and obeying God's command to love one another (2:7). In this fundamental sense, then, to respond rightly to a God who is love is to love one another (4:7-21), and to love one another is to abide in God and so in eternal life (2:28-3:18).

2. *In response to the suffering of God's people, God discloses a "word of truth" to map the only way of salvation.* Unlike proverbial wisdom, which is learned by human experience, this "word" is revealed by a good and generous God (1:18), especially through Torah (1:22-25; 2:8-10; 4:11-12) and Jesus tradition (i.e., "the faith of the Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious

One," 2:1), then implanted and "humbly" received within the faith community—presumably through the instruction of "wise and understanding" teachers (3:1, 13)—with an aim to save believers from deception and death (1:21; cf. 1:13-16).

For James, however, this redemptive word is clearly practical, not dogmatic. Unlike in the Pauline tradition, truth claims are less about what to believe or in whom to trust than about how to live life together in a milieu fraught with suffering, powerlessness, false teaching, and other external and internal threats to the congregation's solidarity. For this reason, the mark of friendship with God rather than with the world (4:4-10) is to control an inward "passion for material things," because "worldly desires" provoke intramural strife (3:6-8, 9-12; 4:1-3) and promote disregard and even the murder of the righteous poor (2:2-4; 5:1-6)—the very ones whom God has elected as heirs of the coming kingdom (2:5). In this sense, then, a rejection of the "word of truth," which trains the community how to respond to suffering with wisdom, only increases the community's suffering and otherwise leads it toward gehenna (3:6). Simply put, the wisdom that God discloses refocuses the community's attention from selfishness and worldliness toward caring for others, especially for brothers and sisters who are poor and powerless.

Petrine letters. This same connection between the divine word and the community's love for each other is also a critical feature of the moral vision of 1 Peter, which is evidently challenged by the community's social status as "aliens and strangers" and the suffering its status occasions. As with James 1:27, the community's response to its trials is purity before God, which is validated by obedience to God's truth and evinced by friendship within the household of faith (1:22; cf. 2:15; 3:17; 4:2, 19). The structure of the Petrine response to human suffering, then, is roughly the same as that introduced by James.

The divine word for 1 Peter, however, is not disclosed as practical wisdom but as proclaimed gospel (1:22-25); it is kerygmatic, not sapiential. In the Petrine version of the formula, Jesus is not merely the exemplar of the life-saving word, but its medium. The initial articulation of this divine word, then, is prophetic (Isaiah; cf. 1:24-25a; 2:22-25) and concerns Jesus' suffering (1:10-12), which is then "preached to you" (1:12, 25) for the salvation of souls (1:9). According to this missionary redaction of the formula, God's *logos* (1:23) becomes the Lord's *rhēma* (1:25). Not only is the convert's "rebirth" into purity/holiness of life the result of accepting this christological truth, it also becomes the nourishment of the convert's theological and sociological formation (2:2; cf. "oracles of God," 4:11).

This same move from prophetic *logos* to apostolic *rhēma* must be what 2 Peter has in mind in 3:2's exhortation to "remember the *rhēmata*"

when commenting on 1 Peter (cf. 3:1). Yet apostolic proclamation has been reified into a tradition that confirms the “prophetic word” (Isaiah) about Petrine Christology (1:19), and now performs the role of the community’s norm by which teaching and lifestyle are judged as either “true” or “false” (cf. 2:1-2), righteous or profane (2:17-22). And if 2 Peter is viewed in some sense as a later redaction of 1 Peter’s theological argot, then what seems critical to note, if only in passing, is its apocalyptic gloss: whatever or whoever does not meet this apostolic norm is “stored up for the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly” (3:7) and thereby excluded from existence in the “new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells” (2 Pet 3:13). In this sense, 2 Peter transforms the motive for the convert’s new life of holiness, into which s/he is initiated by the word of God, and within which is realized a community of loving relationships (1 Pet 1:22-25); no longer is it the generative powers of the divine word, but the imminence of God’s coming cosmic triumph.

Johannine letters. Similarly, the Johannine Epistles articulate the importance of the “word [*logos*] of life” (1:1), which is also funded by memories from Jesus’ life (1:2) and is coextensive with the apostolic proclamation/traditions of the gospel (1:3-4). This word is the truth and exposes what is therefore false; moreover, it is this christological word the community must obey as God’s commandment (2:3-7).

As with the other CE, this word of truth disclosed in Christ’s life issues a moral directive that is centered on God’s command to “love one another” (i.e., other believers) and, according to these epistles, to love others self-sacrificially, in contrast to the world, whose affections are centered selfishly on “the things in the world” (2:15-17; cf. 3:11-18; 2 John 5-7). In fact, the subject matter of this divine word qua commandment is the manner of Jesus’ lifestyle (2:6; cf. Jas 2:1; 1 Pet 2:21) in relationship to others (3:16), which was observed by the apostles (1:1-3) and now provides the epistemic basis of what they write down (1:4) for those who are confused by the trauma of the community’s recent schism (2:18-27). Simply put, to live as Jesus lived is to obey God, and to obey God’s “new commandment,” personified by Jesus, is to supply the hard evidence of the believer’s purity (3:3; cf. 4:10)—and so of abiding fellowship with God as a member of God’s eternal family (3:4-10).

Jude. Once again, Jude defines the terms of “our common salvation” by apostolic traditions (vv. 3, 17, 20), but washes them with Israel’s story, which is prompted by constant reference to well-known Old Testament and Jewish “types” of events and persons (vv. 5-16). The resulting conception, then, is Jewish in its sensibility, so that doctrinal error is morally constructed even as eternal life with God is conditioned on one’s moral effort (vv. 21-23). Likewise, those who perform “ungodly deeds” will be

judged (vv. 14-16) and punished (v. 7), especially those “ungodly persons who pervert the grace of our God by licentious behavior” (v. 4; cf. 8-11). In fact, Jude contends that such behavior constitutes a denial of Jesus (v. 4) and is devoid of the Holy Spirit (v. 19).

While the problem of suffering no longer pertains to the present situation of the implied readers, since they are probably members of established (and middle-class) congregations, their suffering remains prospective of the future situation of those who have departed from the moral rigors of the apostolic tradition for the shameful behavior of those who deny the Lord Jesus (vv. 4, 11-13, 14-16): Jude predicts they will undergo “a punishment of eternal fire” (v. 7). Yet this threat is stated with some irony, since Jude’s theology of suffering is due to the severe judgment of “the only God” against “all ungodly for their deeds of ungodliness” and is not precipitated against believers by outsiders (as in 1 Peter) or because of their difficult circumstances (as in James).

While the particular circumstances of Jude are different from those envisaged in James, the structure of the author’s recommended response to their eschatological situation is roughly the same: believers are to rescue those communicants who have failed spiritually from “the fire” (v. 23a; cf. Jas 5:19-20) while maintaining their own purity (v. 23b; Jas 1:26-27) by engaging in the religious practices of the “most holy faith” (vv. 20-21; cf. Jas 1:12, 27). To love God is to obey God (v. 22; cf. 1 John 4:16), and to obey God is to have mercy for others (v. 23; cf. Jas 1:22-2:26). What seems increasingly clear from the CE collection, then, is not only a firm resistance against any divorce of right belief from moral behavior, but also an equally firm conviction of the eternal consequence of a Christian faith that is not imbued with right conduct. Sharply put, the faith community’s participation in God’s coming triumph is conditioned upon its ongoing obedience to God, as God’s word is defined by the congregation’s authoritative traditions (biblical, Jesus, apostolic).

3. *In obedience to this word, the community must practice “pure and undefiled” behavior as the public mark of friendship with God.* Rather than a code of right conduct, the most important element of the moral universe introduced by James consists primarily of purity practices—again, congregational practices that serve both ethical and eschatological ends. While the interior life of the individual believer is surely an important feature of this same moral universe, the “word of truth” for “religion” that stands “pure and undefiled” before a holy God stipulates that the congregation must resist the moral pollutants of the surrounding “world” (or anti-God) order (1:26) and care for the needy neighbor in accordance with God’s “perfect law of liberty” (1:27; 2:1-13). There is a sense in which the rest of the composition articulates more fully what practices a “pure and undefiled” congregation

performs as acceptable to God (cf. 2:24). I note four purity practices in particular with references to other CE, noting only in passing that the centrality of these same purity practices for the church's social identity is confirmed by the book of Acts:

a. The legacy of the Jewish piety personified by legendary James is articulated in the letter as a piety of poverty/powerlessness, of which the Lord Jesus himself is exemplary (2:1), which may occasion suffering that tests the community's devotion to God. In fact, according to James, the hallmark of religious purity is to protect and care for the poor (1:27; 2:2-7), in keeping with the Torah's stipulation (2:8; cf. 1:25). This practice of a community of goods reflects an asceticism—a world-denying ethos—that has replaced the world's preoccupation with material goods with a heartfelt devotion to God (4:1-5:6; 1 John 2:15-17).

b. The concern of a community of goods for a radical social purity extends also to speech (Jas 3:17) as a principal element of good human relations, which identifies a collective interest in healthy speech patterns as a fundamental moral property of Christian existence (1 Pet 3:13-17; 2 Pet 2:3; 1 John 3:18; 3 John 10).

c. The literary *inclusio* of James (1:1 and 5:19-20) delineates a kind of spiritual Diaspora that frames another practice of the community's ethos: a commitment to rescue wayward believers from theological and moral error, not only to preserve doctrinal purity, but also to ensure their end-time salvation (cf. 2 Pet 2; Jude 17-25).

d. The thematic of hospitality in James, not only to strangers as in 3 John but also to marginal members of one's own congregation (1:27; 2:14-17), is central to the CE discourse on Christian community (cf. Jas 2:14-17; 1 Pet 1:22; 4:9-11; 1 John 3:17-20a; 2 John 9-11; 3 John 5-8). What is critical about the development of this theme is that hospitality is never proffered indiscriminate of spiritual status; thus, for example, according to 2 John 9-11 and 3 John 5-8, hospitality is rendered (or not) only to those who have been purified (see 1 John 3:3) by the "doctrine" of the "word of life" (2 John 9-11; cf. 1 John 1:1-4). In this way, then, hospitality toward other believers is an effective means for maintaining a congregation's solidarity against its external threats, but it is also a concrete demonstration of separation from the world.

4. *Theological orthodoxy by itself is inconclusive of friendship with God and is made effective only when embodied in loving works.* This conviction is perhaps the most central to this collection's theological grammar, especially when viewed in canonical context as bringing balance to the church's historic appropriation of the canonical Paul; it is nicely stated by James 2:22-24 in the form of a traditional midrash on Abraham's enduring legacy for Israel's faith: "[Abraham's] faith was completed by [his] works" (2:22), and on this

basis he “was called the friend of God” (2:23). On the basis of this biblical example, James concludes that “a person is justified by works and not by *sola fide*” (2:24). James does not argue that works replace faith; nor is James vague about the more liturgical and formalistic expression of faith that is being criticized, a faith that is incanted as magically productive of divine approval (see 2:14). Faith in one God is presumed by the Jewish author of this letter. Rather, James intends to define a more traditional (or Jewish) variety of Christian faith that articulates an effective pattern of salvation in ethical terms, so that the means of divine approval is not reduced to the facile act of publicly professing orthodox beliefs (Rom 10:9); James demonizes this practice (2:19). His emphasis is clearly posited on the moral act of doing those works prescribed by God’s “word of truth” (i.e., purity practices; see above) as the complement of professed faith by which a congregation’s devotion to God is both confirmed and recognized. Nonetheless, the moral rigors stipulated by Christian faith, which embodies a manner of life that is contrempts to the world order, are not an afterthought for James but rather the hard evidence demanded for God’s final approval (2:12-13): works that confirm faith save, even as faith without works does not. If the trajectory of Pauline tradition into the canonical period evinced the kind of fideism that James opposes, as I think is likely, then the high purchase of this conviction for regulating the performance of the Catholic collection as Scripture must not be underestimated.

Petrine letters. The literary (paraenetic) shape of 1 Peter, which generally prescribes the conduct of a holy people formed by divine mercy rather than by profane society, helps to underwrite Christianity as an ethical religion. The hortatory mood of the Petrine tradition, which equates right conduct with God’s will (3:13-17), is justified by two statements that extend and clarify the theological grammar of James. The first is that a community that has been “reborn” to obey God does so in a manner predicated by God’s own holiness (1:13-16); that is, God’s holiness begets a holy people and stipulates their holy conduct—a purity formula that summarizes the protasis of a prophetic history of Israel (cf. 1:10-12). But 1 Peter’s emphasis is on the apodosis of this very history, whereby the prophets anticipated the impartial judgment of Israel’s conduct by their holy God. In view is not God’s paternal authority over God’s people, but God’s holy character that renders impartial judgments “according to each one’s deeds” (1:17). The spiritual test occasioned by suffering can be failed; it is the eschatological accounting of “one’s deeds,” whether one measures up to God’s standards, that becomes the believer’s central motive for “doing right, if it be God’s will, than doing wrong” (3:17).

The second statement is christological: namely, that “Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example that you should follow in his steps”

(2:21). Of course, that Messiah Jesus serves God's redemptive purposes as a moral exemplar is a point that James also makes (2:1), but more allusively than does the robust Christology of the Petrine Epistles. Christ's example stipulates not only the manner of obeying God as suffering servant but also the redemptive consequence of those works, both presently (2:12; cf. 3:18-21) and in the future (2 Pet 3:10-11).⁵¹

Johannine letters. The theological crisis that has generated the succession of "antichrists" from the faith community is the separation of loving works from traditional beliefs about Christ. The "world" of these epistles is ecclesial, divided along the lines of right and wrong beliefs; what the false teachers—the antichrists—believe about Christ and Christian life constitutes the world from which a purified people must separate. Confession of traditional beliefs about Christ, which can be known only through the "anointing" of abiding in him (2:20, 27), is only one necessary piece of evidence that a people are now participating in new life with God; the mere profession of faith is insufficient (cf. 3:18) and requires the assurance that only the "deed" of loving one another provides (3:17-24). Confirmation that a people truly abides in the truth that belongs to God is right conduct: "the person who does right is righteous . . . whoever does not do right is not of God, nor is the one who does not love other believers" (3:7). That is, to maintain fellowship with God requires the more holistic evidence of right beliefs and right behaviors, since one without the other is contrary to the truth and will subvert, therefore, the congregation's assurance of God's eternal love.

5. *Finally, the reward for steadfast obedience to God's word is eternal life with God.* According to James, the believer who perseveres through trial and tribulation with love for God and neighbor intact will be blessed by God with the "crown of [eternal] life" (1:12). The horizon of the "salvation of the soul," which is the destiny of those who obey the divine word (1:21, 22-25), is set in the future when the Lord will come (5:7-9) to restore and complete human existence (1:3-4). At that concluding moment of salvation's history, God promises to grant to those who obey God's word, especially its principal command to love the poor and powerless neighbor (2:8-13), whatever they lack (1:3-4, 9-11). Conversely, those who fail God and disobey God's "law of liberty" will be shown no mercy (2:13) and will be judged and then destroyed (5:4-6), for only God has authority to judge the foolish and bless those who purify themselves and pursue God's will (4:7-12; 5:5-11).

Petrine letters. Following the lead of James, 1 Peter posits that the "salvation of the souls" will be fully disclosed at the future "revelation of Jesus Christ" (1:7, 13; cf. 4:13; 5:4). While the hope of this future salvation is one outcome of faith (1:9) and is made possible by the "precious

blood of Christ" (1:19), the authenticity of a faith that saves is validated by the believer who "does right" according to God's will (3:17). The moral force of this contingency is made more urgent because "you may suffer many trials," which will occasion a testing of faith (1:6b-7a). The absence of holy works, which denotes spiritual failure, will therefore not secure a favorable verdict from the Holy Father, whose impartial judgment is not of the orthodoxy of a sinner's faith but of the holiness of a believer's works (1:13-17).

Significantly, the beginning point for 2 Peter's conception of the future is not the resurrection of Jesus but his transfiguration (1:16-17). The precise reason for this shift from 1 Peter's emphasis on the resurrection is not clear to me, although perhaps its tacit appeal to the Petrine tradition (Peter as eyewitness to Jesus' messianic authority) is intended to justify a discredited account of future (the delayed Parousia) promoted by the apostolic tradition (cf. 3:1-4). In this sense, Christ's transfigured "majesty" is the prolepsis of "the power and the parousia of the Lord Jesus Christ" (cf. 1 Pet 5:1), and those false teachers who disbelieve that God is capable of either creation's destruction or its new beginning (3:3-4) or a judgment of believers' moral actions will themselves be discredited.⁵²

Johannine letters. When compared to the Fourth Gospel, the final form of the Johannine letters emphasizes the faith community's future reward at the Parousia of Jesus (1 John 2:28), which will be made "complete" even as it is "won" by God's children who abide in "the doctrine of Christ" (2 John 8-9). The particular distinction of this future reward is to see God as God is (1 John 3:2), which is a status of intimacy and revelatory insight allowed only the Son to this point (cf. John 1:18). For this, then, the true believer "hopes" (1 John 3:3a); however, it is a real possibility only for the believer who "makes himself pure just as Christ is pure" (3:3b)—a purity whose character agrees with the moral competence of Jesus (cf. 2:6). A future that can realistically envisage godlikeness (3:2) as its reward is logically heralded by a present lifestyle that embodies the morality of Christ.

Such is the "eschatologic" of the Johannine letters, which underscores the moral competence of those who abide in doctrinal truth: God's nature abides in the believer so that the one reborn of God does not commit sin (1 John 3:4-10), for "everyone who does right is born of God" (2:29), and on this basis "we may have confidence and not shrink from God in shame at [Jesus'] coming" (2:28). Not only will this event disclose the legitimacy of a cruciform community's response to God in following the lead of God's Suffering Servant, but the Lord's future return purposes to disclose God's final triumph over hostile forces that continue to provoke the suffering (and martyrdom?) of God's holy children.

Jude. The doxology of Jude supplies an apt *peroratio* of the entire CE collection, concluding by iterating its central subject matter a final time in eschatological garb: the future prospect of a believer's eternal life with God is motivated by the implicit demand to live presently "without [moral] blemish" and preserved "from falling [into sin and death]," not only by "building yourselves up in your most holy faith . . . [and] keeping yourselves in the love of God" (20-21), but also by the actions of a congregation whose vocation it is to save those immature believers "by snatching them out of the fire" (22-23).

NOTES

Chapter 1

- 1 The address was given at the last session of the SNTS Seminar on “Catholic Epistles and Apostolic Traditions” / “Katholische Briefe und Aposteltraditionen” at the General Meeting of the SNTS in Halle, August 5, 2005. The English version was translated by Grit Schorch and revised by the author.
- 2 Cf. Karl-Wilhelm Niebuhr, “A New Perspective on James?—Neuere Forschungen zum Jakobusbrief,” *TLZ* 129 (2004): 1019–44.

Chapter 2

- * This essay, “A Unifying Theology of the Catholic Epistles,” was a contribution to the Colloquium Biblicum Lovaniense (July 2003), which met immediately prior to SNTS (Bonn) in 2003, and is included in *The Catholic Epistles and the Tradition* (BETL 176, ed. J. Schlosser; Leuven: Peeters, 2004), 43–71.
- 1 We should note in passing how different the status of this question is when compared to the scholar’s scruples regarding the Pauline corpus of letters. Biblical theologians typically approach the Pauline collection, even inclusive of its disputed membership, with the presumption of its essential theological unity. Whoever their real authors or intended readers are and no matter in what literary shape they have arrived at our canonical doorstep, the Pauline collection extends the thought of a particular person, and the

theological conception of each Pauline letter is measured by the theological dispositions of that particular person.

- 2 H. Y. Gamble, "The New Testament Canon: Recent Research and the *Status Quaestionis*," in *The Canon Debate* (ed. L. McDonald and J. A. Sanders; Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2002), 288.
- 3 Eusebius clearly thinks the authority of these disputed CE, and especially James, was challenged not because of theological error but rather because of their lack of use. It may well be that his observation of their "catholicity" (if not canonicity) is a way of underwriting the theological and functional unity of the collection. Moreover, it should be said that the canonical redaction of the CE collection was contested through the Reformation and Luther's famous concerns about James, and the other four letters remain disputed by the Antiochene communion within the Orthodox Church to this day. Before Luther, however, were still others, such as Isho'dad of Merv, who in the ninth century considered only James, 1 Peter, and 1 John—the letters of the three pillars—as canonical. He claimed that other CE lacked religious authority because of their literary "style" (by which he surely means their subject matter—apocalyptic, mystical) and their lack of use in the teaching ministry of the ancient church, which is hardly different from Luther's criticisms of James. Only 1 Peter, and to a lesser extent 1 John, escaped the disputations of ancient Bible scholars.
- 4 For a record of these various canon lists, see B. M. Metzger, *The Canon of the New Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1987), 299–300, 305–15. Indices of quotations and allusions are found in many sources as well; consider also the variety of data (and relevant indices) included in McDonald and Sanders, *The Canon Debate*.
- 5 What is clear from even a cursory reading of Eusebius' observations about "the traditional Scriptures" is this functional criterion of biblical authority, whether or not "any church writer made use of [a book's] testimony" (*Hist. eccl.* 3.3). Thus, for example, even though the authority of 2 Peter is rejected by some, Eusebius admits that "many have thought it valuable and have honored it with a place among the other Scriptures."
- 6 I acknowledge my debt to David Nienhuis for the observation, made in the context of a stimulating and ongoing private conversation, that the formation of the CE collection as a historical phenomenon has high purchase for understanding its ongoing canonical role in and theological contribution to NT theology. In particular, he suggests that the late addition (and composition) of the Letter of James in some sense "completes" and is constitutive for the CE collection qua collection. This is the central thematic of his University of Aberdeen dissertation, finished in 2005 under the direction of Professor Francis Watson.
- 7 For the idea that the biblical canon as a whole and each part within is judged as roughly analogous to an ecclesial (and ecumenical) *regula fidei*, see R. W. Wall, "Rule of Faith in Theological Hermeneutics," in *Between Two Horizons* (ed. J. Green and M. Turner; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 88–107.

- 8 James has 1,749 words/247 stichoi; 1 Peter has 1,678 words/237 stichoi; 1 John has 2,137 words/269 stichoi. Adding 2 John (245 words/32 stichoi) and 3 John (219/31 stichoi) to 1 John and 2 Peter (166 stichoi) to 1 Peter does not alter this arrangement, especially when throwing Jude (71 stichoi) into the mix.
- 9 Although dating biblical compositions is tricky business, the early use of both 1 Peter and 1 John would commend an early date of composition, probably some time during the first century in their final form. By the same token, 2 Peter and James are almost certainly much later pseudepigraphy—perhaps even concurrent with and intended for the completion of the CE collection. As an important element of his Aberdeen dissertation, D. Nienhuis promises a new thesis regarding the composition of James as it relates to the canonical redaction of the CE collection. It is my understanding that he is prepared to argue that James is pseudepigraphy motivated by canonical concerns—that is, by the constitutive role the letter would perform in completing a Pillars collection for use within an emergent NT canon.
- 10 Trobisch, for example, seems to posit a great deal of importance in the production of codices for the final redaction of the NT canon. See also E. J. Epp, “Issues in the Interrelation of New Testament Textual Criticism and Canon,” in McDonald and Sanders, *The Canon Debate*, 503–5.
- 11 D. Trobisch, *Die Endredaktion des Neuen Testaments* (NTOA 31; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1996), 40–43.
- 12 For a fuller description of this project, and illustrations of it, see R. W. Wall and E. E. Lemcio, *The New Testament as Canon: A Reader in Canonical Criticism* (JSNTSup 76; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992).
- 13 R. W. Wall, “The Function of the Pastoral Epistles within the Pauline Canon of the New Testament: A Canonical Approach,” in *The Pauline Canon* (ed. S. E. Porter; Leiden: Brill, 2004). I find no compelling objection to Trobisch’s thesis that Paul himself may have placed a collection of his “major” letters into circulation, which were then added to and recognized as Scripture (if not also as canon) by important Pauline tradents shortly after his death; see his *Paul’s Letter Collection* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994). Marcion did not create a Pauline canon, then, but simply valorized one already in circulation. What is more important than the fact of an early Pauline canon is the church’s realization early on that Paul’s teaching also supplied biblical warrants to heretical teaching, especially for various second-century gnostic movements, including the one founded by the teachings of Marcion. Given this internal threat to the church, the need for a second collection of letters to bring balance and constraint to the letters of the canonical Paul—perhaps a collection similar in emphasis to the concerns voiced by James to the Paul of Acts, according to Acts 21:20–21 (see below)—was readily apparent. In any case, I take it that Marcion is an important symbol of a canonical process that forms or edits collections of writings as necessary correctives, in order for them to function more effectively analogically to the church’s *regula fidei*.

- 14 For this argument, see R. W. Wall, *Community of the Wise: The Letter of James* (NTC; Valley Forge, Pa.: Trinity, 1997), 148–52. Most of my exegetical comments about the meaning of James are found in expanded form in this book.
- 15 Even though, as many contemporary scholars have opined, James 2:14–26 does not carry the same hefty weight for its author that it has during its (esp. Protestant) *Wirkungsgeschichte*, it is probably this one text more than any other—precisely because of its “anti-Pauline” correction, not in spite of it—that attracted the canonizing community: James 2:14–26 captures well the intent of the canonical process, if not its authorial motive. Indeed, many understand Pauline tradition (rather than the traditions of a first- or second-century Judaism, which are rarely mentioned in any case) as the book’s primary conversation partner. In any case, from a perspective within a NT setting, James now responds to what Paul might become or how Pauline traditions might be used if as a canon within the canon. It is from its profoundly Jewish ethos that canonical James corrects canonical Paul. But to focus attention on 2:22 (rather than 2:21) reminds the reader that the canonical motive is not adversarial but complementary of a closer analogy to the church’s *regula fidei*.
- 16 See R. W. Wall, “The Canonical Function of 2 Peter,” *BibInt* 9 (2001): 64–81.
- 17 I recognize that the nature of a pseudepigrapher’s motive is an important feature of the critical discussion of the literary genre. My own view is that reducing the discussion of motive to a psychological level, whether or not in writing pseudepigraphy the author intends (or not) to commit a fraud, is misguided because such a motive is irrelevant to a letter’s canonical status. Canonicity is a more functional consideration, having mostly to do with the religious utility of a book’s performance. The canonical motive, which may also have occasioned its production (rather than more particular historical exigencies) and certainly determined whether to include 2 Peter in the CE collection, has to do with its theologically constructive relationship to 1 Peter—as indicated by 2 Peter 3:1–2.
- 18 For this point, see J. Painter, *1, 2, and 3 John* (SP; Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical, 2002), 51–58, whose interpretive strategy is to read the three letters together; also C. C. Black, “The First, Second, And Third Letters of John,” in *NIB* 12 (ed. L. E. Keck; Nashville: Abingdon, 1998), 365–78 (esp. 366).
- 19 R. Bauckham’s study of members of Jesus’ family, in particular James and Jude, makes a compelling case for their lasting influence within the Jewish church in Palestine: *Jude and the Relatives of Jesus in the Early Church* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1990). In particular, they sought to preserve the Jewish legacy of the church, especially the importance of a Jewish way of salvation that elevated the church’s moral obligations as conditional of life with God, against a Paulinism (but not necessarily Paul’s idea) that “faith alone” liberated believers not only from sin’s consequence but also from any moral responsibility to flee from sin. In my mind, the final redaction of the CE,

which is enclosed by James and Jude, reifies this point within the canon and in self-correcting conversation with the Pauline corpus.

- 20 See D. Moody Smith, “When Did the Gospels Become Scripture?” *JBL* 119 (2000): 3–20.
- 21 My deliberation presumes only a formal canon. We all recognize that informal “canons with the canon” delimit which books have “real” authority by their actual use—or lack of use—by their different readers. For this reason, it might be argued that the 1 Peter–1 John canon survives to this day, since other CE are typically neglected in worship and instruction.
- 22 This is a principal thematic developed in my seminar paper on “Acts and James,” presented at the 2002 Durham meeting of the SNTS and included in this volume, although my interest is largely rhetorical (the role of a frontispiece within a canonical collection) rather than historical. Without doubt, the Fathers from Eusebius forward vested theological value in the proper ordering of the letters. The dissertation of D. Nienhuis promises to supply the historical justification project in making this same point; see n. 6 above.
- 23 I find, however, no hard evidence to prove B. M. Metzger’s unsubstantiated assertion that “the Acts of the Apostles was added chiefly to prove Paul’s apostolic character and to vindicate the right of his Epistles to stand alongside the Gospels” (*Canon*, 257–58). This more likely is an anachronistic construction of modern Protestant scholars to support a variety of claims about the canonical Paul, his Gentile mission, and his message. In any case, if this were true, such a move would have been grounded in a misreading of the book of Acts.
- 24 We should note the debates over the apostolicity of James and his “biological” relationship to Jesus, given the church’s belief of Mary’s perpetual virginity; the subtext of both debates was the ongoing authority of the Jacobian legacy within the broader church. In fact, the book of Acts would seem to legitimize the continuing importance of James on different grounds than his apostolicity or his relationship to Jesus: namely, his leadership of the Jerusalem church. In this regard, I note that in the preface to his early *Commentary on the Seven Catholic Epistles* (ca. 700), Bede the Venerable writes, “Although in the list of the apostles Peter and John are accustomed to be ranked as more important, the Letter of James is placed first among these for the reason that he received the government of the church of Jerusalem, from where the source and beginning of the preaching of the Gospel took place and spread throughout the entire world” (trans. D. Hurst, O.S.B.; CSS 82; Kalamazoo, Mich.: Cistercian Publications, 1985), 3.
- 25 Note, for example, the close linguistic and conceptual relationship between Acts 15:13–29; 21:17–26 and the Letter of James. I should mention that the addition of the dominical “do unto others” saying to the all-important 15:20, 29 (but strangely not to 21:25) in Codex Bezae may well have been intended to draw linguistically the close connection between the teachings of Jesus and of James, in order to underwrite James’ religious authority for the future of the church. This is an important datum if the motive of this second version of Acts is primarily canonical, as I have suggested; cf. R. W.

- Wall, "The Acts of the Apostles," in *NIB* 10 (ed. L. E. Keck; Nashville: Abingdon, 2002), 1–368, here 17–18.
- 26 Some scholars continue to argue that Clement of Alexandria, who wrote an interlinear commentary on 1 Peter and 1 John (*Adumbrations*), included James in this work as well. Since his commentary survives only in a much later and highly edited Latin "translation" from Cassiodorus, the inclusion of James may reasonably be doubted, given the silence of a Letter of James from this same period and region. The first important interpreter of the CE as a collection, including James, appears to be Didymus from the mid-fourth century, who is noteworthy as a pioneer of the commentary genre. It should be noted that Augustine mentions in passing a commentary on James (*Retract.* 58), but unfortunately we no longer possess a copy of it. In any case, the authority and importance of a Letter of James is almost certainly a fourth-century phenomenon.
- 27 Origen claims that James is Scripture, but evidently this is not then to claim that James is also canon. Recently, several scholars have demonstrated the differences between the two, from both historical and systematic perspectives.
- 28 Especially the *Ps.-Clem.*, *Gos. Heb.*, *Gos. Thom.*, *Ap. Jas.* and 1–2 *Apoc. Jas.*, Eusebius' recollection of Hegesippus in *Hist. eccl.*, and Clement of Alexandria's *Hypotyposesis* portray James' personal piety, his reception of special revelation from God, his political importance in Jerusalem, and his martyrdom; however, whether or not fictitious, these personal characteristics do not carry over directly to the Letter of James, whose thematics are more practical and whose Jewish ethos and beliefs are not cast in overtly personal terms. I do find the repeated references to a priestly James—as the Aaron to Jesus' Moses—fascinating, given the letter's emphasis on purity; cf. S. McKnight, "A Parting within the Way: Jesus and James on Israel and Purity," in *James the Just and Christian Origins* (ed. B. Chilton and C. A. Evans; Leiden: Brill, 1999), 83–129. In this same collection, Chilton offers the suggestive hypothesis that the practice of Nazirite vow-keeping within primitive Christianity "has been underestimated, and that James' deep influence is perhaps best measured by the extent to which other prominent [Christian] teachers fell in with his program [of Nazirite purity]" (252).
- 29 I myself have argued, with others, that the Ebionites followed such a canon, which included Jesus traditions found in Matthew's gospel; see Wall and Lemcio, *New Testament as Canon*, 250–71. A more precise articulation of this same point would distinguish between the legacy of James the Christian leader and the Letter of James. In absence of a quotation or clear allusion to a textual tradition—a Letter of James—in their writings, one must assume that these various Jewish Christian groups were tradents of a Jacobian legacy rather than students of a Jacobian letter, even though the legacy is doubtless the principal source of the letter.
- 30 Most modern constructions of the authorship of James fail to distinguish a theory of its composition from its canonization in any case. But to argue that James is second-century pseudepigraphy simply avoids the vexing

silence of this letter into the third century, even among those groups who remembered James as the church's exemplary apostle. Given its apparent Palestinian sources, which seem to reflect a first-century *Sitz im Leben* and its literary genre as a Diaspora letter from the same period, if James is pseudepigraphy, then part of the motive for its composition must have been to preserve the memory of James, even if only to underwrite the letter's important role in the final redaction of the NT. These issues have recently been reconsidered in a highly suggestive essay by M. Konradt, "Der Jakobusbrief als Brief des Jakobus: Erwägungen zum historischen Kontext des Jakobusbriefes im Lichte der traditionsgeschichtlichen Beziehungen zum 1 Petr und zum Hintergrund der Autorfiktion," in *Der Jakobusbrief: Beiträge zur Aufwertung der "strohernen Epistel"* (ed. P. von Gemünden, M. Konradt, and G. Theißen; Münster: Lit, 2003), 16–53, in which he offers a tradition-historical theory of the letter's composition. His study compares the use of traditions James holds in common with 1 Peter, which form a discrete trajectory of earlier Pauline and Jesus traditions. His reconstruction of the "Antioch incident" in Galatians 2 (rather than Acts 15, which would have greater purchase for a canonical construction than Galatians 2) leads him to conjecture that the provenance of James is Antioch, where the pseudepigrapher would have edited the James legacy to produce a revised version of Christian existence, for a congregation in which trials occasioned a spiritual (rather than sociological) testing of the internal quality of its life with God. In a sense, the different handlings of common traditions about Christian existence reflect the different legacies of a missionary Peter (hence greater concern with the church's relations with pagan surrounding) and a pastor James (hence greater concern with believers' relations with other believers), which are already reflected in the book of Acts. Konradt's study, among its other accomplishments, links together James and 1 Peter in a way that may well have canonical implications of the sort that I am trying to cash out in this essay.

- 31 The Jewish background of James has been constructed by modern criticism; however, this background has more to do with maintaining a distinctively Jewish ethos than with the ongoing performance of particular elements of a Judaic religion, whether from the Second Temple or the Diaspora. In this sense, James' rejection of supersessionism is neither formalistic nor legalistic, but adheres in a principled way to a Jewish way of life—a way of life that James contends is threatened in part by the church's appropriation of the Pauline tradition. I would add that the addition of the Catholic collection to the NT canon serves this canonical function of delineating the boundary between Christianity and Judaism, not by doing so sharply, but rather by underwriting the continuity between them.
- 32 Ironically, Luther's negative appraisal of James—that it fails a Pauline test of orthodoxy—illustrates this same methodological interest in reading James and Paul together; yet Luther fails to engage the two according to the hermeneutics of the canonical process. To do so would have led him to recognize that the CE collection as a whole might actually render a Pauline

- “justification by faith” gospel more faithful to the church’s *regula fidei*, and for the very reasons he rejected James.
- 33 My formulation of the relationship between the Pauline and Catholic witnesses draws on an insight of James A. Sanders, who long ago commented that the Pauline witness concentrates upon the “mythos”—or unifying narrative—of God’s salvation as articulated/promised in the Torah and fully articulated/fulfilled in Christ; cf. James A. Sanders, “Torah and Paul,” in *God’s Christ and His People: Studies in Honour of Nils Alstrup Dahl* (ed. Jacob Jervell and Wayne A. Meeks; Oslo: Universitets forlaget, 1977). In my opinion, it is the ethos of the Torah—obedience as loving response to God’s saving mercies—that the CE collection concentrates upon. The result of reading both corpora together, then, is a fuller presentation of God’s gospel. See Wall and Lemcio, *New Testament as Canon*, 232–43.
- 34 While the logical relationship between Acts and the NT letters is reflected by the canonical process (see below), the narrator’s own claim (Acts 1:1) is that Acts is better related to the preceding gospel, probably for christological rather than literary reasons.
- 35 As an exercise in a recent class on Acts, I had my students reflect upon the importance of studying a particular Pauline text (e.g., Ephesians, 2 Timothy) in light of their prior study of related pericopae in Acts (e.g., Acts 18:24–19:41, Acts 20:17–38). The purpose of their project was more than to identify common Pauline traditions; it was to explore the meanings of a Pauline text that were brought to clearer light by its intracanonical relationship with Acts.
- 36 For an argument that the church’s title for this composition, Acts of the Apostles, reflects its interest in the religious authority of the church’s apostles (including Paul and James), see R. W. Wall, “The Acts of the Apostles in the Context of the New Testament Canon,” *BTB* 18 (1988): 15–23.
- 37 I am mindful of H. Räisänen’s probing historicist response to his titular question, *Neutestamentliche Theologie?* (SB 186; Stuttgart: Verlag Katholisches Bibelwerk, 2000), which distinguishes more precisely between first and subsequent readers within faith and academic communities. The canonical approach presumes that biblical theology is a theological rather than historical enterprise, whose aims are determined by the church’s (rather than the per se academy’s) intentions and so are religiously formative more than intellectually informative.
- 38 Trobisch, *Endredaktion*.
- 39 Cf. O. Cullmann, *Peter: Apostle, Disciple, Martyr* (London: SCM Press, 1953), 63–69.
- 40 See Wall, “Canonical Function of 2 Peter,” 77–79.
- 41 See P. N. Anderson, *The Christology of the Fourth Gospel* (Valley Forge, Pa.: Trinity, 1996), 274–77, who suggests that at the one point in Acts where Peter and John speak with one voice (4:19–20)—Peter alone speaks when they are teamed elsewhere in this narrative world—the narrator has composed a saying that combines Petrine (4:19) with Johannine (4:20) traditions.

Their pairing in Acts in both work and speech may well reflect an emerging consensus within the ancient church that their traditions, both personal and theological, are complement parts of an integral whole.

- 42 I think this critical conclusion is typically overstated, however, since there are fundamental differences between Scripture's Petrine witness and the Pauline kerygma.
- 43 The Jewish cast of Paul's story in Acts is a principal exegetical interest of my commentary on "Acts," in *NIB* 10; see 213–15 for an introduction to this narrative thematic.
- 44 Of course, the Pauline Letters would not disagree with this conclusion. I would argue, however, that for the Pauline tradition, these social, moral, and religious practices that mark out a people as Christian are the natural yield of "being in Christ," and that being in Christ is the result of profession that "Jesus is Lord." A Pauline redemptive calculus, whether understood politically or personally, is concentrated by the beliefs of the Pauline gospel rather than by the practices of the Pauline churches. It is this essential difference of logic that fashions—I think from the early church—a different spirituality, one centered by orthodox confession, from that found in the congregations of the CE traditions.
- 45 Tradition- or source-critical explanations of the linguistic similarities between James and 1 Peter, or even James and 1 John, typically presume roughly similar dates of composition. If James is a much later pseudepigraphy, as Nienhuis proposes, then the same linguistic or ideological similarities critics find that link James with other CE may well be rather the literary elements of a midrash-like composition that offers commentary on earlier, extant texts (namely 1 Peter, 1 John, perhaps Jude). In my opinion, this feature is consistent with the literary makeup of James; see my *Community of the Wise*, 20–21.
- 46 I take it that the community's ethos envisages what scholars have more recently termed *covenantal nomism*, according to which God chooses Israel to receive the Torah as both a symbol of God's faithfulness and a command to obey. In this sense, the Torah mediates and maintains God's faithful relationship with an obedient Israel, not as the result of human achievement, but by divine mercy; see E. P. Sanders' now-contested definition in *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977), 422–23.
- 47 In an earlier study, I argued that the theological center of the non-Pauline epistolary collection is suffering: "Introduction: New Testament Ethics," *HBT* 5 (1983): 49–94.
- 48 See J. H. Elliott, *1 Peter: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB; New York: Doubleday, 2000), 97–103.
- 49 Painter, *1, 2, and 3 John*, 85.
- 50 R. Law, *The Tests of Life: A Study of the First Epistle of St. John* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1909).
- 51 See Wall, "Canonical Function of 2 Peter," 72–74.
- 52 Wall, "Canonical Function of 2 Peter," 77–79.