

1. ὙΠΗΡΕΤΑΙ ... ΤΟΥ ΛΟΓΟΥ: DOES LUKE 1:2 THROW LIGHT ON TO THE BOOK PRACTICES OF THE LATE FIRST-CENTURY CHURCHES?

THOMAS O'LOUGHLIN

If we reflect on the practicalities implicit in any of the text traditions of the earliest Christian communities, we appreciate at once that there must have been systems for the preservation, copying, and diffusion of those texts. The relationship of the gospels of Matthew, Luke, and John to Mark is a case in point. Both Matthew and Luke had independent access to copies of Mark (and thus we have the Synoptic Tradition), while John also had access to Mark's account and dovetailed his own narrative with it. These patterns of use imply that in the last decades of the first century the text of Mark was being both preserved and disseminated in the churches. These same churches were also preserving and diffusing the letters of Paul after his death – and indeed adding to them – and so building up the Pauline corpus and tradition. And while we have but an indeterminate fraction of what was written by those Christians, the fact that we have as much as we do points to deliberate practices of preserving writings within the churches at a time when our evidence for formal structures within those communities is minimal.

This interaction between Jesus' early followers and written texts has long been a concern of scholarship.¹ Since the work of C.H. Roberts, we

¹ One could argue that this is both behind all concerns about canon (so starting with Eusebius) or text (and so with Eusebius if not Origen), but I am thinking of modern concerns about books as cultural objects in a society, and works such as H.Y. Gamble, *Books and Readers in the Early Church: A History of Early Christian Texts* (New Haven and London: Yale UP, 1995).

now speak with confidence about the material form, codices, taken by those early texts.² Much attention has in recent years been devoted to the networks for their diffusion over 'the holy internet';³ and this in turn has allowed us to see texts such as the gospels as having an appeal across the churches.⁴ Similarly, the patterns of survival of those texts enable us to observe the beginnings of the processes that would eventually lead to their 'canonisation'.⁵ That said, the emergence of the four gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, John) as a distinct grouping of texts, or the gathering together of Paul's letters, with the implication that they had some special authority is perhaps better described as 'proto-canonisation' in a second-century context.⁶ Given the obvious extent of this engagement with written texts, it is somewhat surprising that we have virtually no direct references as to how those early communities obtained, retained, duplicated, or published their books.⁷ The only exceptions to this silence is the Deutero-Pauline reference to an exchange of letters between Colossae and Laodicea (Colossians 4:16), presumably from the later first century,⁸ and the mention in the Pastorals of

² C.H. Roberts, *Manuscript, Society, and Belief in Early Christian Egypt* (Oxford: The British Academy and Oxford UP, 1979).

³ M.B. Thompson, 'The Holy Internet: Communication Between Churches in the First Christian Generation' in R. Bauckham (ed.), *The Gospels for All Christians* (Grand Rapids MI: Baker, 1998), pp. 49–70.

⁴ This is the theme underlying the essays in *The Gospels for All Christians*.

⁵ See G.N. Stanton, *Jesus and Gospel* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004), pp. 63–109.

⁶ Before we find references to 'the four gospels' as *somehow* forming a unit – which we could link with Tatian's choice of them more than a decade before Irenaeus we have the special status attributed to *both* Matthew *and* Luke in the *Protevangelium Jacobi* (see T. O'Loughlin, 'The *Protevangelium of James*: a case of gospel harmonization in the second century?' in M. Vinzent (ed.), *Studia Patristica: Papers Presented at the Sixteenth International Conference on Patristic Studies held in Oxford 2011*. (SP 65). Leuven: Peeters, 2013, pp. 165–73).

⁷ Interestingly, very few scholars have asked who *owned* these books – despite interest in the cost of their production – and whether they were owned by individuals or communities. An exception to this is H.I. Bell and T.C. Skeat, *Fragments of an Unknown Gospel and Other Early Christian Papyri* (London: British Museum, 1935) p. 1, who pointed out that they could not be certain whether or not certain manuscripts 'were used by, and very likely written for, a Christian owner or community'.

⁸ On the problem of the dating of Colossians, see V.P. Furnish, 'Colossians,

a concern of ‘Paul’ about his books and parchments (2 Timothy 4:13) presumably from sometime in the first-half of the second century.⁹

The purpose of this paper is to ‘fly a kite’ and investigate whether in Luke 1:2 we have a reference to early Christian engagement with books. I want to argue that the essential basis of the usage of books, not to mention their availability for copying and dissemination, is some structure for keeping them safe from day to day when they were not being read in the community, and that in Luke 1:2 we may have the name which designated specific officers of the churches, ‘the servants of the word’ (ὕπηρέται τοῦ λόγου), whose task it was to preserve and guard each church’s ‘library’.¹⁰

LUKE 1:2 IN RECENT RESEARCH

Luke writes that he wants to produce in his book an ‘orderly account’ of ‘the events ... just as they were handed on to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants (αὐτόπται καὶ ὑπηρέται) of the word.’ The word ‘eyewitnesses’ has caught the attention of exegetes, while ‘servants’, the other term, has most commonly been seen as simply a clarification of their authority: they are ministers in the process of the *kerygma*. Those followers who were eyewitnesses from the beginning are indeed the servants of the word and, as such, it is what these eyewitnesses have handed on to writers such as Luke that forms the basis of his gospel.¹¹ At the core of the current lively debate over these ‘eyewitnesses’ (who are the focus of all attention) is whether or not they should be seen as simply firsthand observers of the events surrounding Jesus of Nazareth: they are the primary historical witnesses.¹² Their testimony builds the essential

Epistle to the’ in D.N. Freedman (ed.), *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*. (New York NY: Anchor, 1992), I, pp. 1090–6 at pp. 1094–5.

⁹ See T.C. Skeat, “‘Especially the parchments’: A note on 2 Timothy IV.13.” *JTS* ns 30 (1979) pp. 173–7. On the date of the Pastorals, see A. Yarbro Collins, ‘The Female Body as Social Space in 1 Timothy’ *NTS* 57 (2011) pp. 155–75.

¹⁰ The first person to suggest some link between ὑπηρέται and a church’s ‘library’ was J.N. Collins, ‘Re-thinking “Eyewitnesses” in the Light of ‘Servants of the Word’ (Luke 1:2)’ *ExpT* 121 (2010) pp. 447–52, at p. 452.

¹¹ See R. Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony* (Grand Rapids MI: Eerdmans, 2006). This work has generated a large body of discussion; see, for example, J.C.S. Redman, ‘How accurate are eyewitnesses? Bauckham and the eyewitnesses in the light of psychological research’ *JBL* 129 (2010) pp. 177–97.

¹² Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, p. 117.

bridge between 'the Jesus of history' and 'the Christ of faith'; so it is appropriate that Luke should designate them as 'the servants of the word'. As such, the 'eyewitnesses' and the 'servants' are clearly one group.¹³

The rationale for Bauckham's position on the identity of the two groups may be new, but the conclusion is not. Michael Goulder sees both groups as Luke's 'tradents' and notes:

The Greek requires a single group with a double function: those like Peter, who both accompanied with the Lord through the ministry, and witnessed to the fact thereafter in preaching.¹⁴

On this reading it is useless to imagine that there can be any specific group of ὑπηρέται because it is but an aspect of being the living link from Luke's time back to the events. Moreover, these 'ministers of the word' have a distinct theological identity:

The Gospel ... fulfils the word of God in the Old Testament, and it was handed down to the present Church by men who saw it all from the beginning, and also preached it. 'Ministers of the word' may include an element of seeing the events as fulfilments as well as proclaiming them as facts: only so, in Luke's understanding, do they become 'the word (of God)'.¹⁵

Thus Goulder arrives at what has been the most widespread view of the passage: these servants/ministers are to be seen in terms of a ministry of preaching, and this ministry in the church is the sort of high status activity imagined in such passages as the Great Commission of Matthew 28:19. They are 'servants' of the church in a manner analogous to that of Paul and Barnabas taking the gospel into new situations, or, for that matter, later clerical preachers who viewed themselves as 'ministers of the gospel'.

¹³ Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, p. 122.

¹⁴ M.D. Goulder, *Luke. A New Paradigm*. (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1989), p. 201.

¹⁵ Goulder, *Luke*, p. 201; J.A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel according to Luke I-IX* (New York NY: Doubleday, 1981), p. 294 is explicit that γένομενοι should be rendered 'becoming' which then is both the basis and conclusion of his argument; most interpreters and translators have opted for the simpler solution of rendering it as 'being' (but Bauckham does consider the possibility that 'the eyewitnesses' later on became 'the servants of the word').

A slightly more nuanced position can be found in Joseph Fitzmyer's commentary which acknowledges that 'the Greek of this phrase is not easily translated' and that the 'problem lies in whether Luke is referring here to one or to two groups ... who shaped the early tradition.'¹⁶ In contrast to those who think that two groups are mentioned, Fitzmyer believes that the key lay in the 'single art[icle] *hoi* which governs the whole construction'. From this base he held that one should understand the sentence as 'the 'eyewitnesses' of [Jesus'] ministry ... who eventually became the 'ministers of the word'.¹⁷ While he acknowledged that 'Luke is distancing himself from the ministry of Jesus by two layers of tradition', Fitzmyer is clear that what is involved is a single body of people, and their service is to be understood in evangelical terms: they preached God's word.

This consensus that 'eyewitnesses' and 'servants of the word' are identical (both as human beings and with regard to task) has recently been challenged by John N. Collins, who responding to Bauckham,¹⁸ argues that this 'commonly accepted understanding, ... can now be seen as a misconception'.¹⁹ His argument begins by noting that:

... of the 57 instances [in the *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae*] of *autopt-* prior to 100 CE, 54 instances occur in context with some form of *gignesthai* ... Exactly the same pattern repeats in 200 instances (over and above citations of Luke's phrase in Christian writers) over the next 400 years. On the other hand, no instance of such a pairing (other than at Luke 1:2) occurs in the case of the Greek servant word (*hypéret-*).²⁰

Collins having thus dismissed the notion of some historical progression (implicitly replying to Fitzmyer), now thinks of a single group of human beings but with two functions: they have the twin tasks of eyewitnessing the word (Collins points out that 'eyewitness' has no forensic connotation in Greek; so perhaps a better rendering of his meaning would be 'being observers') and being servants of the word:

¹⁶ Fitzmyer, *The Gospel according to Luke I-IX*, p. 294.

¹⁷ Fitzmyer, *The Gospel according to Luke I-IX*, p. 294; who based his conclusion on the work of R.J. Dillon, *From Eyewitnesses to Ministers of the Word* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1978), pp. 269–72.

¹⁸ Collins writes: 'Bauckham (p. 122) agrees, as perhaps most do, that the two designations apply to one group of people.' ('Re-thinking "Eyewitnesses"', p. 450).

¹⁹ Collins, 'Re-thinking "Eyewitnesses"', p. 450.

²⁰ Collins, 'Re-thinking "Eyewitnesses"', p. 450.

So we have an eyewitnessing function 'of the word' as well as a distinct function of being servant 'of the word'.²¹

Collins also makes another significant observation: Luke's 'focus in his preface is upon a literary tradition'. While Luke's gospel was written in an oral environment,²² Luke is concerned with earlier written materials, i.e. books, and the place they hold in the communities' memory.²³ This allows Collins to note that the moment of writing narratives is one event, but there is a subsequent reception and use of those books in the communities: here lies the role of the *αὐτόπται καὶ ὑπηρέται γενόμενοι τοῦ λόγου* in that they receive and read the narratives aloud in the community.²⁴

This view is considerably different to that of earlier writers, and indeed Bauckham, in that we are now dealing with a group of functionaries in the churches, who are not only after the historical time of the events surrounding Jesus but also of the time when these events appeared as narratives in writing (a time which for Luke must be after the time of Mark, since we can be certain that Mark's narrative is one of those accounts). So, for Collins, these officials of the community, with the double name, are 'responsible for the library of the community' and, more significantly, for:

receiving and authenticating documents of the tradition. They are highly literate and have received their appointments from the community.²⁵

As such they fulfil a role of being guarantors of the assurance (*ἀσφάλεια*) of the treatises (*λόγοι*) with which Theophilus has been instructed (Luke

²¹ Collins, 'Re-thinking "Eyewitnesses"', p. 450.

²² Although Luke was concerned with books, he was dealing with them in an oral environment in which the book is more akin to a modern recording of a voice speaking, than a book as we conceive it which communicates from mind to mind without sounds being heard; see P.J. Achtemeier, '*Omne verbum sonat*: The New Testament and the Oral Environment of Late Western Antiquity' *JBL* 109 (1990) pp. 3–27.

²³ This significant observation picks up a theme that was common in older scholarship that emphasised the place of the book, as such, in Luke's thinking (e.g. E.J. Goodspeed, 'Some Greek Notes – I. Was Theophilus Luke's Publisher?' *JBL* 73 (1954) p. 84); and for a more recent view of the matter, see L. Alexander, 'Ancient Book Production and the Circulation of the Gospels' in R. Bauckham (ed.), *The Gospels for All Christians*, pp. 71–105, at pp. 103–5.

²⁴ Collins, 'Re-thinking "Eyewitnesses"', p. 451.

²⁵ Collins, 'Re-thinking "Eyewitnesses"', p. 452.

1:4).²⁶ So both Collins and Bauckham agree that this single group has the task of being ‘specially authorised guarantors of the traditions’:²⁷ they are the representative and responsible tradents. Yet while Collins begins with the assertion of two tasks, these are not clearly delimited in his article and seem to be indistinguishable in practice.

ANOTHER FORMULATION OF THE EVIDENCE

Collins’ work marks a definite advance on earlier exegesis in that (1) it clarifies the focus of Luke on *the written materials* already in existence at his time, and (2) proposes a distinction, at least conceptually, between *αὐτόπται* and *ὑπηρέται*. However, with regard to the latter point Collins does not draw out how these ‘dual functions’ are actually different in the life of the community. Being ‘a witness and a servant of the word’ seems to amount to belonging to the same group and doing the same thing: ‘as well as handling the material [i.e. the books], they also taught it’.²⁸ So is this simply a hendiadys?²⁹

Against this suggestion is the clear point that ‘being observers’/ ‘eyewitnessing’, or even reading the word is distinct from being ‘servants of the word’ when we note that this servant-word, *ὑπηρέτ-*, is usually linked not with a notion of ‘minister’ (in the modern sense of a ‘minister of religion’) but that of a minor practical functionary.³⁰ The *ὑπηρέται*, Collins has shown elsewhere,³¹ were functionaries that dealt with practical matters of commerce; they are the clerks and officials that put into effect the instructions of others who are their superiors. They are, by analogy, those one meets when one goes to a modern office with a query rather than those

²⁶ Collins’ translation is worth noting: ‘that you [Theophilus] may learn to have a deeper appreciation of the treatises about which you have been instructed’ (‘Re-thinking “Eyewitnesses”’, pp. 452).

²⁷ Collins quoting Bauckham.

²⁸ Collins, ‘Re-thinking “Eyewitnesses”’, p. 452.

²⁹ So thought B. Gerhardsson, *Memory and Manuscript* (Lund: Gleerup, 1961) pp. 234–5, who compared it to another, ‘service and apostleship’, in Acts 1:25; we should add the references to ‘bishops and deacons’ in Philippians 1:1 and *Didache* 15.1.

³⁰ Collins, ‘Re-thinking “Eyewitnesses”’, p. 451, points out that *hypéretés* is, in fact, a term with a well established place in bureaucratic usage for minor officials.’

³¹ J.J. Collins, *Diakonia: Re-interpreting the Ancient Sources*. (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1990), pp. 83, 94, 125, 153, 166–7, 174, 183, 314, and 320.

‘in charge’ or those ministers that one sees in the pulpit. This notion of ὑπηρέτης referring to a functionary assisting someone else is consistent with its use in Jewish writings be they prior to or roughly contemporaneous with Luke (e.g. Josephus).³² Moreover, when we look at its usage in the New Testament two points stand out. First, ὑπηρέτης designates *lesser* officials, usually within some power pyramid. A clear case of this is Matthew 5:25 where ‘the judge hands over to the guard’ (μήποτε σε παραδῶ ὁ ἀντίδικος τῷ κριτῇ καὶ ὁ κριτῆς τῷ ὑπηρέτῃ) and where the story’s rhetoric assumes that one knows that one is descending from the judge to the ὑπηρέτης and thence to prison. This would be true whether the usage is ‘factual’ (e.g. Mark 14:54) or ‘imaginary’ (e.g. John 18:36 – the angelic army are Jesus’ operatives, not his equals).³³ Second, there is no specifically cultic or religious range to the word. One might argue that 1 Corinthians 4:1 (where Paul, Apollos and Cephas are to be thought of as ὡς ὑπηρέτας Χριστοῦ) is an exception, but this fails to see the point Paul is making: these named people, himself included, are to be seen as lesser officials carrying out the work of the Christ, and they should be seen as functionaries for him despite being designated ‘apostles’. Equally, when in Acts 26:16 Paul is appointed to be a ὑπηρέτης καὶ μάρτυς of Jesus, the point of the story is to express the fact that Paul is the functionary of Jesus in what he does.

So the notion that αὐτόπται and ὑπηρέται form a hendiadys does not take account of the lowliness of ὑπηρέται, while, if it is the case that the αὐτόπται have some specific function in the churches of being the performers or guarantors ‘of the word’, then it is most unlikely that they would also be the ὑπηρέται. The implication seems clear: not only do these officials belong to the time between the arrival of written accounts of Jesus and Luke’s time, but they are two distinct groups in the church. Read in this way there was not one group in the communities,³⁴ but those who witnessed to the orderly accounts in the churches – presumably with high

³² See K.H. Rengsdorf, ‘ὑπηρέτης κτλ.’ in G. Kittel and G. Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids MI: Eerdmans, 1972), VIII, pp. 530–9.

³³ See also Matt. 26:58; Mark 14:65; John 7:32 and 45; 18:3 and 12; 19:6; Acts 5:22 and 26. This point was also made by Rengsdorf in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, VIII, pp. 539–42.

³⁴ We might recall that both αὐτόπται and ὑπηρέται were the same individuals was the one element common to the positions of Rengsdorf (p. 543), Fitzmyer, Goulder, Bauckham, and Collins.

literary skills (as Collins suggests) and who gave voice to those texts by reading them aloud – and a group of *lesser* officers (ὕπηρέται) who were more concerned with the practicalities of having ‘orderly narratives’ in the community, kept them safe, brought them out at their gatherings, and made sure that they were preserved. Both together were needed to allow for the word to be heard in the churches, and to ensure that these accounts, such as Mark (and Q, if that was some sort of written document), were available to someone like Luke who was about to write his own orderly account.

We noted earlier that if ὕπηρέται was to be rendered as ‘ministers’³⁵ then we tend to think of someone like ‘the minister in the pulpit’; whereas it would be better to think in terms of them being ‘office assistants’. Now I would like to refine the simile: if the αὐτόπται are the lectors to the community and had some significant function such as selecting what was read, then ὕπηρέται should be imagined as similar to those lesser officers in a community, perhaps called ‘sacristans’ or ‘vergers’, who look after the practicalities of the cult.

However, before exploring this further, I want to express my debt to Collins’ article. It is there that the notion that the αὐτόπται and ὕπηρέται are officers within the Christian community, and that Luke is familiar with them as such, is first made. However, for both Collins and Bauckham these αὐτόπται have an authorizing, and guaranteeing function. Collins thinks of them as ‘authenticating documents of the tradition’. This notion seems a little wide of the mark: we have no evidence whatsoever of any system of these tasks; and if there were such a system then the tasks of those who were later arguing for a ‘canon’ would have been much easier.³⁶ In fact, our evidence points overwhelmingly towards the conclusion that there was nothing like a system of ‘authorization’ in the early communities.³⁷

³⁵ So Douay-Rheims, Authorised Version, and RSV; following the usage of the Vulgate: *ministri*.

³⁶ Both Bauckham and Collins (despite his warning note) seem to have exported the forensic overtones of ‘eyewitness’ in our usage into Greek; moreover, Collins earlier in his article dwells on the question of authority as exercised by the Vatican’s doctrinal watchdogs (under a variety of names) and seems to have imagined that there was a similar concern for ‘authorised’ texts in the early churches.

³⁷ See W. Bauer (trans. R.A. Kraft and G. Krodel), *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity*. (Philadelphia PA: Fortress Press, 1961) [English translation of *Rechtgläubigkeit und Ketzerei in ältesten Christentum*, Tübingen: Mohr, 1934].

Ὑπηρέται: A JOB SPECIFICATION?

At this point we should turn our attention to other references to a ὕπηρέτης found in Luke. The first occurs in Luke's depiction of Jesus going to the synagogue in Nazareth. When he stood up to read, he was given (by whom it is not stated, but presumably this was the same person to whom Jesus returned the scroll)³⁸ the scroll of Isaiah. He read, rolled up the scroll again, gave it back to the attendant (τῷ ὑπηρέτῃ),³⁹ and sat down (4:20). Commentators usually point out that this assistant was but one of a range of synagogue officials mentioned by Luke: there are also the ἀρχισυνάγωγος (8:49 and 13:14) and πρεσβυτέροι (7:3).⁴⁰ That the ὕπηρέτης was the lesser official, dealing with the liturgical practicalities would fit what we know of the word's range of meanings from elsewhere. This has led Fitzmyer to see this person as 'the *bazzan*' and describe him as 'a sort of sacristan or sexton'; while Rengsdorf has noted that there is a burial plaque to one Flavios Julianos, a ὕπηρέτης, who was apparently a synagogue official.

However, if we shift our attention from the scene in the story to that of its narration we have, very probably, a scene with which Luke's audience were themselves familiar. The prophets were being read in their assembly and there too the gospel was being proclaimed sometimes by an evangelist, but probably more often by someone else – we might adopt Collins' suggestion of the literate αὐτόπται – giving sound to marks on papyrus. That person had to be provided with the book, and the book had to be preserved afterwards. The ὕπηρέτης of the story set in Nazareth is a reflection of the tasks performed by the ὕπηρέτης in the Christian community. If that is the case, then the similarity of scene would be theologically significant within Luke's view of history: the risen Christ is imagined to be present in that community hearing the story just as he was recalled as being present in the Nazareth synagogue.

That ὕπηρέτης was a specifically Christian term for Luke is supported by his non-use of the term in 12:58. While Matthew (5:25) reads ὁ κριτῆς

³⁸ A point made by Rengsdorf in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, VIII, p. 540, n. 80.

³⁹ 'Attendant' is found in RSV and NRSV; older translations echo the Vulgate's use of *minister*.

⁴⁰ Rengsdorf, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, VIII, p. 540, n. 80; and Fitzmyer, *The Gospel according to Luke I-IX*, p. 533.

τῷ ὑπηρέτῃ, Luke has ὁ κριτὴς σε παραδώσει τῷ πράκτορι. This change to a word, otherwise not attested in early Christian literature, may indicate an unwillingness in Luke to have any in his audience hearing, in a parable on repentance, the equivalent of ‘and the judge hand you over to the sacristan’ – a fate that does not inspire urgency.

The other occurrence of a ὑπηρέτης is in Acts at 13:5 where a certain John was the ‘assistant’ to Barnabas and Saul in Cyprus.⁴¹ Only one thing is clear from the text: this assistant is not placed on the same level those who have been ‘sent out by the Holy Spirit’ (13:4). How John assisted Barnabas and Saul is not mentioned – and he is often assumed to have, in Jefford’s words, ‘served as a recorder, catechist, and travel attendant’. But since he is not sent ‘by the Spirit’ it seems implicit in Luke’s account that he dealt with practical matters, and as such was more likely the ‘travel attendant’ rather than a ‘catechist’. Many years ago, B.T. Holmes took up this question in detail and studied all the then known mentions on papyrus of such a ὑπηρέτης.⁴² This reveals that these were minor officials, but also (or at least for those who left a trace on papyrus) that they were minor bureaucratic officials carrying out the sort of tasks we today might link with term ‘office assistants’ or, more quaintly, ‘clerks’. This reveals, first and foremost, that for Luke there seems to be no notion of a ὑπηρέτης being some sort of preacher/teacher in the churches, and also that he would expect them to be the sort of people who could read in order to keep track of books, make lists, and perform all the other office skills that a group which uses writings in its corporate life needed.

So how should we imagine them? Assuming that by the time Luke wrote there was already a separation of the churches from the synagogues, then the Jesus-followers were gathering in private houses (Acts 2:42 or 20:8), and we should not imagine these are large spaces, for their regular meetings.⁴³ To this gathering would have to be brought the books they

⁴¹ Usually identified as ‘John Mark’ on the basis that the reference to ‘John’ at 13:5 refers back six sentences to the ‘John, whose other name was Mark’ at 12:25. This John is also linked to others with the names ‘John’ or ‘Mark’ with varying degrees of certainty; see C.N. Jefford, ‘Mark, John’ in D.N. Freedman (ed.), *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*. (New York NY: Doubleday, 1992), IV, pp. 557–8.

⁴² B.T. Holmes, ‘Luke’s Description of John Mark’ *JBL* 54 (1935) pp. 63–72 – this work has still not been bettered; the most recent study of the term ὑπηρέτης (Collins’ *Diakonia*) does not, however, use this invaluable article.

⁴³ See B.S. Billings, ‘From House Church to Tenement Church: Domestic

would use by someone who had a means of caring for the books in his home. The alternative is that the same house was the regular location, and the books were held there, and that there was suitable storage in that house. Either way, someone must have had responsibility for the books, with the task of making sure that they were kept safe – assuming that the outlay and so the ownership of the codices was a community matter – and that the specific book needed for a meeting was at hand.

We know that these communities were in contact with each other through a network of travelling disciples – designated by a number of names such as ‘teachers’, ‘prophets’, ‘evangelists’ – for we glimpse them in many writings, such as Acts, and have regulations regarding them in the *Didache*.⁴⁴ When one of these arrived he may have had his own book with him – the codex is a book for travellers after all – but he might need to use one of the community’s books or to make use in his teaching of some other texts. If the traveller brought with him a text unknown in that community, there might then be the need to arrange to have a copy made for the community; and if the traveller were only staying for the short period, three days, envisaged by the *Didache* (11:5), then this would require familiarity with the processes of copying or knowing how to arrange to have a copy made in the near future whose exemplar would be supplied from elsewhere. By the same token, if another church wanted a copy of something in the care of the ὑπηρέτης, then this would bring its own problems. Making sure that the copy was made, that the original was returned, the copy safely dispatched, and the finances of the whole affair accounted for: such office-based skills were not least among those of the ὑπηρέται noted by Holmes in his 1935 study. And, of course, books wear out and become damaged and so there was need to find replacements: were they being read, for

Space and the Development of Early Urban Christianity – the Example of Ephesus.’ *JTS* ns 62 (2011) pp. 541–69, who challenges the assumptions of many earlier writers who imagined large palatial edifices as the location of ‘house churches’. Moreover, Billings makes the point (p. 543) that the writings which constitute the New Testament are ‘arguably the best primary source for non-elite populations that has survived antiquity’; and I would consequently argue that the ὑπηρέται are just such non-elite officials.

⁴⁴ On this network see T. O’Loughlin, *The Didache: A Window on the Earliest Christians* (London: SPCK, 2010), pp. 105–28; on the practicalities of the network, see Thompson, ‘The Holy Internet’; and on the problems of such inter-church travellers, see A. Milavec, ‘Distinguishing True from False Prophets: the Protective Wisdom of the *Didache*.’ *J ECS* 2 (1994) pp. 117–36.

example, at *symposia* (the scene usually imagined today for early Christian gatherings⁴⁵) where just one spill could render pages illegible? The layers of redaction we find in the text of Mark would provide supporting evidence for many such renewals.⁴⁶ Given the special skills involved in book-related work, I imagine that when the need for such a person arose in a church, if there was a ὑπηρέτης, who already possessed them and had the bureaucratic leaning for keeping track of lists, accounts, and money, that individual would have been selected and could then be known as their ὑπηρέτης τοῦ λόγου.

In short, the ὑπηρέτης kept the codices safely, made them available to those who taught, organised the copying of books and was probably the ‘contact person’ in a church when book production was taking place for another community. In this last task they were, in effect, acting as publishers. Today we would find their analogue in institutional librarians charged to ensure the availability of the books and databases needed for that institution’s work.

So for how many books would they have been responsible? If we take 90–110 CE as roughly the period when Luke was active, then there would possibly have been at least two accounts of Jesus in most communities (Mark and Q) and Luke himself suggests more than two accounts by his reference to πολλοί (Luke 1:1). There was, almost certainly, some collection of letters – its extent in any church at that date cannot be known – but we might think of that as being the ancestor to P46. We can also assume a collection of other shorter texts – other letters, or the *Didache* in some form, or some written sermons – which might have been bundled into a single codex. When we actually look at our evidence for such early combinations of texts – 2 Corinthians being an ideal example⁴⁷ – then we may indeed be observing the work not of theologically sophisticated

⁴⁵ See D.E. Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist: The Banquet in the Early Christian World* (Minneapolis MN: Fortress, 2003); and for its appropriateness of a *symposium*-setting to Luke, see his ‘Table Fellowship as a Literary Motif in the Gospel of Luke.’ *JBL* 106 (1987) pp. 613–6; and P.-B. Smit, ‘A Symposiastic Background to James?’ *NTS* 58 (2011) pp. 105–22.

⁴⁶ See H. Koester, *From Jesus to the Gospels: Interpreting the New Testament in its Context*. (Minneapolis MN: Fortress, 2007), pp. 39–53.

⁴⁷ See H.D. Betz, *2 Corinthians 8 and 9* (Philadelphia PA: Fortress, 1985); we might also think of the various attempts to explain the development of the Pauline corpus as a corpus of letters.

preachers or those who might attract the title of *αὐτόπται* or *προφήται*, but of the keepers of the codices who were pressed by practical considerations of convenience in storing texts in determining what was bound with what. An average collection of half-a-dozen 'Christian' books would not be surprising, but that is little more than a guess. However, the largest part of the library – in both the number of texts as well as in awkwardness for storage – and its most valuable asset must surely have been 'the scriptures' (i.e. those texts we now group under the heading of 'the Septuagint'). Given the importance attached to them by Luke (e.g. in the Emmaus story at Luke 24:27, 32 and 45) and the way he imagines them being used by Peter and Paul (Acts 2:14–36; 17:2 and 11; 18:24 and 28), we must assume that having a copy of 'the scriptures' was a *desideratum* of each community. This is paralleled in the writing of the other evangelists. In the time of Paul, the need would have been supplied in the synagogue; but by the end of the century – with groups gradually separating into different religions, and an increasing division upon linguistic lines – if a church wished to read 'the scriptures' (and all the evidence points to the fact that they did), then they had to have them for themselves.⁴⁸ Obtaining and maintaining such a collection may have been the most demanding task facing the *ὑπηρέται*. Moreover, if we think of them having to look after both 'the scriptures' and the new texts of their own movement, then the designation *ὑπηρέται τοῦ λόγου* makes all the more sense. In this case, 'the word' would not simply refer to the Christian message – as most commentators on Luke assume – but to 'the word of God' implying the whole event of revelation to Israel as recorded in books.⁴⁹

CONCLUSION

One could find support for this understanding of *ὑπηρέται* by following the uses of the term in second-century Christian writings, especially those of Ignatius of Antioch, and this has been done by Holmes, Rengsdorf, and Collins.⁵⁰ I do not want to follow this route for two reasons. First, if one

⁴⁸ The references to 'the reading of prophets' in Justin (*First Apology*, 67) or the second-century papyrus fragments of codices containing Old Testament texts would be certain evidence for this concern albeit from a generation later than Luke.

⁴⁹ Such an understanding of 'the word of God' would be consistent with Luke's use of the term in Luke 5:1, 8:11, 13, 15, 21; and 11:28, and with Acts 4:31 and 6:2,4, and 7.

⁵⁰ Collins did this in his book *Diakonia* and his references to the matter on pp.

accepts this paper's proposal for the task of the ὑπηρέται, then that conditions one's expectations from other references to 'minor officials'; it is simpler to note that these references do not contradict what I have argued here. Second, each of the scholars just mentioned worked on the assumption that Ignatius wrote in roughly the same period as Luke – both reflecting the church in the last decade of the first century and the first years of the second. However, if we accept the later dating for Ignatius, as I believe we must, then that evidence is much more problematic.⁵¹ Ignatius would not be simply a generation later than Luke, but reflect a situation where many developments regarding the Christian self-identity, views of the status of Christian texts, and structures within the churches had taken place. Consequently, a study of ὑπηρέτ- in Ignatius or the *Letter of Barnabas* is today a study in its own right.

Whether one accepts my proposal or not, some things are certain from the very survival of those first-century documents that have come down to us. First, there was some kind of preservation system for books. Second, there was attention to, and mechanisms for, the copying and diffusion of those books. Third, there were structures that allowed texts to circulate independently of travelling performers – because texts have survived (such as Paul's letter to Philemon) which were never intended as performances. Considering these facts we recognise that it is most unlikely they would have come about without attention from those in the community with a specific set of skills, quite apart from literacy. These skills were present in the churches – though probably not ubiquitous or else we might not have lost so much – and the term by which Luke knew them was ὑπηρέται τοῦ λόγου, a group which for him were distinct from αὐτόπται. In performing these mundane but most necessary tasks, these sacristan/librarian-figures deserve, in retrospect, the respect given to them when we view them as 'ministers of the word'.

240 and 330 are particularly important in showing that there is no contradiction with what I have argued here.

⁵¹ See T.D. Barnes, 'The Date of Ignatius.' *ExpT* 120 (2008) pp. 119–30 who shows that it must date from the 140s at the earliest.