

Review of Jennifer R. Strawbridge, The Pauline Effect: The Use of the Pauline Epistles by Early Christian Writers (Studies of the Bible and Its Reception 5). Berlin and New York: De Gruyter, 2015

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DOI:

[10.1163/15685365-12341546](https://doi.org/10.1163/15685365-12341546)

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Document Version

Early version, also known as pre-print

Citation for published version (Harvard):

Houghton, H 2017, 'Review of Jennifer R. Strawbridge, The Pauline Effect: The Use of the Pauline Epistles by Early Christian Writers (Studies of the Bible and Its Reception 5). Berlin and New York: De Gruyter, 2015', *Novum Testamentum*, vol. 59, no. 1, pp. 105-7. <https://doi.org/10.1163/15685365-12341546>

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Download date: 09. Apr. 2024

Jennifer R. Strawbridge. *The Pauline Effect. The Use of the Pauline Epistles by Early Christian Writers*. Studies of the Bible and Its Reception 5. (Berlin & New York: De Gruyter, 2015). vi+310pp. Hardback. ISBN: 978-3-11-043770-6. €99.95.

The concept of this book is as simple as it is brilliant: to compare the treatment of the most-cited passages from the Pauline Epistles in pre-Nicene authors. The result is a tour-de-force, highlighting similarities yet also revealing differences in the first centuries of Christian interpretation. What is more, Strawbridge shows how some of these results challenge current assumptions about the understanding of these Pauline passages by their early audiences. This study is a model of the intelligent collection of data followed by its sensitive analysis and application to historical and theological questions.

The four passages discussed are, in descending frequency of citation, 1 Corinthians 2:6–16, Colossians 1:15–20, Ephesians 6:10–17 and 1 Corinthians 15:50–8. Third place should, in fact, be taken by Philippians 2:6–8, but Strawbridge decides to leave this to one side because of its frequent co-occurrence and overlap with the verses from Colossians. Each chapter thus neatly illustrates a different aspect of the enquiry arising from the passage to which it is devoted: 1 Corinthians 2, about the secret wisdom of God, appears in discussions of the nature and validity of exegesis; Ephesians 6, on spiritual armour, illustrates the use of scripture in exhortation to a Christian life; the chronological presentation of references to 1 Corinthians 15 and its teaching on the resurrection shows hermeneutical development in progress; Colossians 1, full of Christological imagery, is used to examine the role of the Bible in the establishment of doctrine.

The basis for the study is a collection of 27,051 pre-Nicene references to the Pauline Epistles, of which only 2,234 are accounted for by the selected passages. The five mentioned above stand out as the only ones to attract more than 400 quotations, and there are only three others which feature more than 150 times (see page 11). These totals depend in part on the extent defined for each passage, yet it may be suggested that the use of pericopes is more consonant with ancient approaches to the biblical text than the modern system of verses. While Strawbridge relies heavily on the references assembled in *Biblia Patristica* (now online as *Biblindex*), she has reviewed and supplemented this data: seventy-four pages of appendix list each potential citation of the four passages, helpfully classified as ‘reference’, ‘potential reference’ and ‘reference not found’. Users who wish to use these tables to identify all occurrences of a particular verse should be aware that, as in *Biblia Patristica*, multiple-verse quotations are listed under the first in the sequence, so it is necessary to check through preceding entries and not just those of the verse in question. Also, references within individual works appear in a disrupted sequence because they have been sorted as text rather than numbers (e.g. Irenaeus and Methodius on pages 226–7 or Origen on page 244). It is promised that Strawbridge’s entire database ‘will be online as a searchable digital resource from September 2016’ (pages 10, 180), which should overcome these drawbacks. Will this include the full text of each citation?

Even though over seventy-five authors feature in the database, more than half of the references are from Origen. It is intriguing to note that three of the four chosen texts are from letters or passages whose authenticity has been questioned, although the early circulation of complete texts of the Pauline Epistles is not as surprising as

Strawbridge suggests on page 12: reference could be made to the work of Trobisch. On pages 129–32, the author demonstrates how her method offers a more secure approach to recovering early Christian understandings of resurrection than the unverifiable claims recently advanced by Vinzent. In contrast to modern understandings of Ephesians 6 as an aggressive text, Strawbridge makes the striking observation that the military equipment listed by Paul ‘is comprised almost entirely of defensive weapons’ (pages 69; 88–92). This would not have been lost upon early Christian readers, although as early as Irenaeus the panoply is expanded to include a spear (page 78). There is no evidence that pre-Nicene writers considered Colossians 1:15–20 to be a liturgical text or hymn; instead, Strawbridge calls attention to the similarity between the early deployment of this passage and Jewish-Christian traditions such as the *Prayer of Joseph* preserved in Origen’s *Commentary on John* (pages 153–5, 167–8). Her comment on page 108 about Clement of Alexandria’s use of 1 Corinthians 15, however, seems to be inconsistent with the data in Appendix C, where quotations are identified in *Stromata* 2 and 3 but *Stromata* 4 and the *Paedagogus* are only adjudged to be ‘possible references’.

The presentation of the book is generally very good, even featuring a chart in colour. Greek and Latin are quoted accurately and always translated, apart from a crucial *non* on page 163. Typographical errors are few, largely confined to the Bibliography and Index of Ancient Authors and Works; strangely, two fonts appear in the Index of Subjects. There is no list of abbreviations for patristic texts, but most are expanded in the Index of Ancient Sources. It is not obvious why Migne and the *Corpus Christianorum* are given single bibliographical entries but volumes from *Sources chrétiennes*, *CSEL* and *GCS* are enumerated individually. Occasional inconsistencies appear in English orthography (e.g. ‘defense’ on pages 144 and 149, ‘defence’ on 150, 152 and 169) along with extraneous commas (e.g. pages 106, 111, 144): given the variety of synonyms employed throughout the study, this reviewer wishes that the verb ‘to exegete’ could have been avoided (pages 38, 52).

Overall, this book is a pleasure to read. Strawbridge shows herself to be in full control of the complex body of material which she has assembled, attentive to context and detail as well as broader currents of interpretation and scholarship. Fresh details emerge at each turn from a solid foundation of evidence. As a stimulating new approach to a much-traversed field, this winner of the 2014 SBL-De Gruyter Prize for Biblical Studies and Reception History is strongly recommended to theologians, biblical scholars and all interested in the development of early Christianity.

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