Ron Fay  
Trinity Evangelical Divinity School  
Deerfield, IL 60015

The Pauline Canon is the first book in a proposed series of five books about Paul, called Pauline Studies. Brill will be publishing a new volume approximately every year under the editorial guidance of Stanley E. Porter. This book contains essays concerned with delimiting and explaining the Pauline corpus of works.

The first two essays of the book dovetail nicely, as both authors discuss the role of the Pastoral Epistles. James W. Aageson uses them as a test case for delving into the authority behind the Pauline writings. Aageson contends that the concept of canon is clearly taking shape in the midst of the Pastoral Epistles; therefore, it is not a foreign thought to these books that Paul’s letters be considered Scripture. In terms of comparing the three among themselves, he decides that 1 Timothy and Titus are much alike and that 2 Timothy stands in some sense apart. Aageson argues that 2 Timothy relates closely to Philippians, and when it differs from Philippians, that is when it most closely resembles 1 Timothy. Aageson notes that these canonical ties bind the idea of Scripture with respect to the Old Testament together with what the church would call the New Testament, eventually putting into play the problems between church structure and canonical authority. Robert W. Wall takes a narrower approach to the issue, looking at the Pastorals with respect only to the Pauline tradition. Wall posits that there were two different
groupings being circulated: the Pauline corpus of ten and the Pastoral corpus of three (34). In taking the thirteen-letter canon as normative, the early church made theological statements canonically instead of individualistically, detailing what Paul said rather than what Paul said in Romans or Galatians. Walls conclusion is that the Pastorals move ecclesiology in the same direction as Paul but that they give a richer meaning to Paul and a more teacher-oriented aspect to the missionary churches.

The next two essays discuss aspects of epistolary communication. M.-É. Boismard asserts that the letter to the Colossians as it now stands is actually the combination of the original letter to the Colossians with the letter to the Laodiceans. The first section of the essay lists in parallel columns what Boismard calls doublets, sections of Colossians that have similar language and themes in the same order. The second section then takes all of one column together into a reconstituted letter to the Laodiceans. This new letter is a baptismal rite including the description of a person prebaptism and postbaptism. Boismard argues that this new letter is clearly Pauline due to the real-life circumstances and the Pauline phrases it contains. Detlev Dormeyer engages in analyzing what types of letters were written in antiquity and fits the Pauline letters within these categories. The essay begins with a recounting of different types of correspondence per ancient authors, often giving examples of what would fit a specific type. Dormeyer next discusses and lists the various sections within a letter, noting how they differ from common rhetorical structures. The different Pauline letters are examined according to this backdrop, classifying them on the basis of literary and rhetorical structure.

The fifth and sixth essays examine different canonical questions concerning the Pauline corpus. Stanley E. Porter surveys the four major theories regarding the compiling of the Pauline epistles into a Pauline collection. The first theory is that of gradual accumulation, wherein various churches gathered the letters of Paul into collections over time, during and after the time of Paul. The second theory proposes a period of “lapsed interest” during which Acts was written and the importance of Paul as the apostle to the Greeks became more prominent, thus causing a deeper look into and a compilation of his work. Walter Schmithals proposes a much larger group of Pauline letters that were whittled down to seven books by combining them in order to create an antignostic collection. The fourth theory is that a single individual with ties to Paul collected the letters after his death. Porter turns to the theory of Trobisch, which posits three stages of development beginning with Paul collecting the first four. Porter concludes his study by critiquing and rejecting each of the theories, but he also notes the points of similarity that can be used as a foundation for further work. Mark Harding examines the idea of a Pauline canon by gathering all works ascribed to Paul and working through which belong and which do not. After quickly setting aside Hebrews, Harding has a group of twenty-one letters attributed to Paul (136). Once the letters are split into three categories, the letters are
analyzed. The noncanonical letters are dubbed spurious and are set aside after some discussion of each. The practice of pseudepigraphy is discussed, noting the historical circumstances under which it flourished. The undisputed letters likely contain some non-Pauline elements, but the theological and logical thrusts tend to have strong continuity with each other. Harding then summarizes the reasons why the disputed letters are considered inauthentic. He concludes that the disputed letters in the New Testament were pseudepigraphical works written to extend the influence of Paul and were accepted by the Fathers due to their orthodox teaching rather than stylistic similarities with the undisputed letters.

The last two essays in the collection deal with interpolations in the various Pauline books. J. C. O’Neill contends that Paul wrote at least part of each book that bears his name, but not all of any of them. He summarizes the various ways in which the letters would fit on papyrus and scrolls. Moving from the latter to the former would change the way the contents fit on a page, allowing for small sections to be used in various combinations in order to create new letters. O’Neill refers to the work of Earle Ellis, who avers that different smaller compositions could be compiled to make longer works, such as letters. He does not think Ellis goes far enough, since Ellis believes this is centered around Paul, whereas O’Neill thinks it was likely monastic schools collaborating with the early church. He concludes that traditional material, such as lists of teachings based on Old Testament quotations that Paul utilized in his writing, were grafted into Pauline letters, and thus traditional material combined with Paul’s own writing is what actually comprises the canonical Pauline epistles. William O. Walker Jr. writes about various interpolations in the Pauline corpus. He begins by giving a history of what texts have been considered by various scholars to be interpolations. He also gives some helpful definitions, describing the shades of meaning between glosses, interpolations, and redaction. He discusses various ancient authors, noting the vast amount of interpolations across the spectrum of writing, including various letters that approximately correspond to Paul’s work. Thus, Walker is looking to overturn hermeneutical consensus by giving much less of the burden of proof to those who wish to argue for interpolations. The lack of textual evidence for interpolations in Paul is not something that should strongly count against their reality, as the absence of evidence is not the evidence of absence. Walker then lists and explains various criteria that can be used to establish the possibility of textual interpolations. He examines 1 Cor 14:34–35 using the tools he has laid out and concludes that it is likely an interpolation from someone other than Paul.

This book is generally well written and well researched. Each essay takes its task seriously, looking at a wide array of scholarship in order to come to an informed conclusion. The major weakness for this collection is that most of the essays are too brief, each introducing a large topic and then only lightly brushing against the various debates.
surrounding it. The essays vary widely with respect to content and focus, but these individual works come together into a single piece of strong scholarship. This collection assumes the reader has a high level of knowledge, but one need not be an expert in the specific area in order to appreciate the depth of analysis. If you are working in the realm of the Pauline canon with respect to contents, the way it was collected, or the problems of interpolation, this is a book that you must have.