

Jewett, Robert. *Romans: A Commentary*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007, pp. lxx + 1140. ISBN 2006009375. \$90.00.

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Robert Jewett advances a particular reading of Romans in his mammoth commentary in the prestigious Hermeneia series. Jewett's slant in the commentary is summarized admirably on the first page. "The basic idea in the interpretation of each verse and paragraph is that Paul wishes to gain support for a mission to the barbarians in Spain, which requires that the gospel of impartial, divine righteousness revealed in Christ be clarified to rid it of prejudicial elements that are currently dividing the congregations in Rome. In the shameful cross, Christ overturned the honor system that dominated the Greco-Roman and Jewish worlds, resulting in discrimination and exploitation of barbarians as well as in poisoning the relations between the congregations in Rome. The gospel offered grace to every group in equal measure, shattering the imperial premise of exceptionalism in virtue and honor" (p. 1). Paul wrote to "persuade Roman house and tenement churches to support the Spanish mission" (p. 3). In other words, Jewett's commentary stands or falls with his reading of the historical situation.

It should be said, however, that the commentary is not restricted to the particular thesis defended regarding the aim of the letter. As we would expect in a Hermeneia commentary, Jewett's work reflects a careful analysis of ancient sources (both Jewish and Greek). In addition, he interacts regularly, responsibly, and creatively with secondary literature on Romans. Whatever one makes of Jewett's reading of Romans, his completion of the commentary is a stunning achievement. For instance, Jewett's discussion of the cultural situation in Spain and his careful analysis of the names in Romans 16 are very helpful.

In a short review it is helpful to delineate some of Jewett's conclusions. All sixteen chapters were originally sent to Rome, though Rom. 16:17-20 and 16:25-27 represent later interpolations. The letter was addressed to both Jews and Gentiles, with the latter being the majority. Jewett differs from the Nestle-Aland text in twenty-six places. Perhaps the two most significant are his acceptance of the subjunctive in Rom. 5:1, "Let us have peace with God," and his support of the indicative in Rom. 14:19, "We therefore pursue what makes for peace." The letter was most likely composed in A.D. 56-57 while Paul was in Corinth. In terms of the literary character of Romans, Jewett argues that Paul drew upon creeds and hymns, and used the diatribe and midrash in composing the letter. He defends the notion that Romans is an ambassadorial letter which fits within the epideictic genre, though he sees Romans as unique and incorporating other literary features. Paul's view of homosexuality should not be applied individualistically, though Jewett thinks that Paul's argument is flawed and may even be chauvinistic. Incidentally, Jewett regularly introduces the false dichotomy of the corporate over against the individual, which mars the commentary at a number of points. Surprisingly, he seems to be unaware of recent studies on verbal aspect, and hence in some instances he presses the tense of a verb in unconvincing ways. For instance, he argues that the aorist infinitive in Rom. 12:1 must refer to a specific event rather than continuing action.

The learning and research evident in this commentary are truly impressive. The commentary's legacy, however, depends upon Jewett's analysis of the text and his interpretive judgments. For instance, it seems doubtful that the detailed rhetorical schema he proposes fits with Romans. The rules of rhetoric were designed for speeches instead of written discourse. Rhetorical handbooks rarely refer to letters. It is also instructive that early church fathers did not identify the Pauline letters as fitting with Greek rhetoric. A number of the fathers were familiar with rhetoric, and yet they did not understand Paul's letters to be patterned after such rhetoric.

Jewett rightly reads Romans as Paul's attempt to persuade the Romans to support his Spanish mission, and hence the unification of different factions in the church plays a significant role in advancing the Pauline goal. Unfortunately, Jewett exceeds the evidence in pursuing this line of thought, and his commentary lacks the theological depth that we find in Käsemann, Cranfield, Dunn, and Moo. Indeed, Jewett imposes the honor-shame scheme upon the situation in Rome, when sufficient evidence is lacking to justify such a reading of the Roman situation. Surely conflict existed among the Roman churches, but Jewett's attempt to trace the conflict to house churches versus tenement churches goes beyond what can be demonstrated. Indeed, Jewett's confidence in his mirror-reading, which pervades the commentary is quite astonishing. Hence, Paul's statement about salvation in Rom. 1:16 functions as a critique of the Roman civic cult (p. 139). And in Rom. 1:17 Paul is not asking whether individuals have eternal life but whether they are living together in harmony "in faith communities" (p. 146). So too, the promise that believers will reign in life stands in contrast to the rule of Caesar (p. 384). The new life in baptism (Rom. 6:4) stands in contrast to the "claims of superiority in honor that have hitherto divided the Roman churches" (p. 400). Paul's theology of the law in Rom. 7:4 corrects aberrant views that were leading some to think of themselves as superior to others (p. 435). The sin of coveting strikes against the competition that pervaded ancient culture (p. 448). Israel wanted "to maintain its honor through obedience to the law" (p. 644). Many other examples could be adduced along the same lines.

Jewett's microscopic reconstruction of the Roman situation fails to convince. It seems to betray an almost modernist confidence in determining the historical circumstances of the letter, and he fails to heed cautions that have been raised about reconstructing the situation addressed in NT epistles. Jewett's commentary is full of insight and helpful discussions of individual verses. Still, it is doubtful that the fundamental contribution of the commentary will be considered to be anything other than a period piece, reflecting a particular kind of historical critical scholarship at this juncture in history.