

Book Reviews

Romans: A Theological and Pastoral Commentary. By Michael J. Gorman. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 2022. xxiv + 325 pages. \$39.99. doi: 10.1017/hor.2023.14

For its intended audience, this is the finest commentary on Romans I have ever read. For “pastors, students, and laypeople” (xvii), it’s one of the finest commentaries I know on any biblical book.

After introducing Paul (3–20) and Romans (21–56), Gorman analyzes that letter’s structure (33–35): 1:1–17, “The Gospel of God’s Son, Power, and Justification for the Salvation of All”; 1:18–4:25, “God’s Faithful, Merciful, and Just Response to Human Sin”; 5:1–8:39, “The Character of Justification by Faith”; 9:1–11:36, “God’s Faithfulness and Mercy and the Future of Israel”; 12:1–15:13, “Faithful Living before the Faithful God”; 15:14–33, “Paul’s Mission and Plan”; 16:1–27, “Closing.” Little here is controversial. Somewhat unexpected is Gorman’s claim that Romans 14:1–15:13 is the letter’s climax, “the goal toward which the theme of Jew and gentile has been incessantly driving” (266). Another striking assertion: 6:1–14 is “*a story of life at the heart of the epistle of life*” (172, so italicized). The author’s reading is theocentric: “*The creating God who is the resurrecting God is also the justifying God*” (136 [sic]; also 127, 132, 221, 245). That God is triune in character: Father, Son, and Spirit cooperate in humanity’s salvation (147, on 5:1–11). God’s new creation of life is revealed as “resurrectional cruciformity” (167, 172–78, 191–95), whose dimensions are love, faith/faithfulness, and hope (249–50, on 12:9–13).

So much for summary. What qualifies this commentary as outstanding? First, its procedure is pedagogically sublime. Knotty issues of translation for the Greek-less are untied (109, 193, passim). When Paul employs diatribe to argue his points, Gorman inserts charts that parallel the rhetorical interlocutor with Paul’s response (105, 187, 209–10). Lucid excursuses are dedicated to disputed topics: the meaning of righteousness (69–70), “the faith of Jesus Christ” (119), the identity of the “I” in 7:7–25 (182–84), and same-gender sexual relations (88–89, 91 on 1:24–27). On the latter, Gorman concurs with E. P. Sanders that Paul, a Diaspora Jew, assumed homosexuality was

immoral; we do well to acknowledge the complexity of human sexuality sans fixation on sex while obscuring Paul's primary point in 1:18–32: to identify the universal human disposition toward idolatry (78–92). In all cases Gorman presents and weighs alternative interpretations, encouraging “humility and ... charity toward those who disagree” (91). Thus he resists polarized readings (123, 140, 188, 201): the apocalyptic Paul also acknowledges salvation history (247). Each major subsection is substantively summarized, concluding with pastoral, spiritual, and theological reflections, pointed yet open-ended questions raised by the text, and annotated suggestions for further reading, graded in their accessibility, difficulty, and technicality. The book has been scrupulously indexed (301–25).

Second, nourished by premodern traditions as well as modern Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant readings, Gorman consistently brings Paul into conversation with a range of Scripture beyond that to which the apostle refers (reminiscences of Deut 30:19–20a in Rom 8:9–13 [199] and Isa 52:13–15a; 53:11b–12 in Phil 2:6–9 [202]). He misses few opportunities to correlate the concerns of Romans with those of other Pauline letters (Rom 6 // 1 Cor 15 [170–71]; Rom 6:1–7:6 // Gal 2:15–21 [166–67]). To consider Romans “an extended commentary” on 2 Corinthians 5:14–21 (28) is remarkably astute.

Third, this is a courageous commentary. It dismantles Trumpism's bastardization of Romans 13 (257–59) as handily as it skewers postmodernism's “*laissez-faire Christian ethic of tolerance of everything in the name of freedom and respect for diversity*” (269, author's emphasis).

Enter some quibbles. Is “forgiveness” as integral to salvation in Romans as Gorman suggests (123–26 plus nineteen other mentions versus a single occurrence, citing Ps 32:1, in Rom 4:7)? Does Romans 12:1–13:14, emphasizing “love and goodness to all” (245), function as the Holiness Code (Lev 17–26 [243]), which intended to set Israel apart from the nations? There is a lamentable reference to “the late ... Leander Keck” (242), who, at this writing—and publication, *Deo volente*—is still breathing.

To sum up: this commentary rouses me to reread Romans and teach it again. No higher tribute could I pay Professor Gorman than that.

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