

*Introducing Romans: Critical Issues in Paul's
Most Famous Letter*

Richard N. Longenecker

Grand Rapids, Cambridge UK: Eerdmans, 2011, xxvii
+ 490 pp. \$40 / £27, pb, ISBN 978-0-8028-6619-6.

SUMMARY

This volume provides a solid survey of many critical issues in Romans. It summarises the scholarly consensus on a number of issues, discusses the purpose of Romans in detail, its genre and themes and its structure and argument. It is valuable for scholars and students alike in what it offers, but insufficient as a balanced treatment of all recent critical issues in Romans.

RÉSUMÉ

Dans cet ouvrage, l'auteur fait état de nombreux problèmes critiques qui se posent à propos de l'épître aux Romains. Il résume le consensus académique sur certains d'entre eux, aborde en détail les questions du but de l'épître, de son genre, de ses thèmes, de sa structure et de son argumentation. Sa contribution sera utile aux spécialistes et aux étudiants, mais demeure insuffisante pour un traitement équilibré de toutes les questions soulevées par la recherche récente.

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Dieser Band bietet einen gründlichen Überblick über viele entscheidende Anliegen im Römerbrief. Er fasst die übereinstimmende wissenschaftliche Meinung zu einer Reihe von Fragen zusammen, erörtert in Einzelheiten das Ziel des Römerbriefes, sein Genre und seine Themen sowie die Struktur und Argumentationslinie. Dabei ist er ein nützliches Werkzeug für Wissenschaftler und Studenten gleichermaßen in dem, was er bietet, doch er bietet eben nicht genug, was die ausgewogene Behandlung aller wichtigen Anliegen im Römerbrief angeht.

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This introduction to Paul's letter to the Romans is an advance on Longenecker's forthcoming substantial commentary on Romans, which is described as a 'truly exegetical commentary' on pp. 467f. Longenecker provides a detailed and clearly written survey of current research on Romans but also argues his own cases.

In the *first part* he addresses 'Important matters largely uncontested today'. These include 'Author, Amanuensis, and Involvement of Others', the integrity of the letter and occasion and date. The occasion of the letter, far from uncontested, is closely related to its purpose which is treated in *part two* which discusses the addressees (Rome in Paul's day, Jews and Judaism in Rome, Christianity in Rome, identity, character, circumstances, and concerns of the addressees). In view of the extensive 'Romans Debate' of the last three decades the chapter is relatively brief; for a recent survey of the debate (not included in Longenecker's bibliography) see A. A. Das' *Solving the Romans Debate* (Minneapolis:

Fortress, 2007).

Part two also addresses the purpose of Romans. Longenecker begins with a summary of positions based on Paul's own consciousness and ministry and those based on conditions existing among the Christians at Rome. He then discusses the methods involved in determining Paul's purpose or purposes (recognition of the epistolary frame of the letter, the chances and perils of 'mirror-reading' and the significance of external data) and offers his own identification of the primary and subsidiary purposes of Romans. Paul wanted to 'give to the Christians in Rome what he calls a "spiritual gift", which he thought of as something uniquely his' and 'to seek assistance of the Christians in Rome for the extension of his Gentile mission to Spain' (158). In addition, he wanted to defend himself against certain criticisms of his person and various misinterpretations of his message, and to counsel regarding the tensions surfacing in Romans 14-15 and regarding the Christians' relation to the governmental authorities.

Part three addresses 'Conventions, Procedures, and Themes'. Discussion includes Greco-Roman oral, rhetorical and epistolary conventions. Under the unusual heading 'Jewish and Jewish Christian procedures and themes' we find:

- the biblical quotations and allusions in Romans – intertextuality, one of the storm centres of recent scholarship on Romans, would have deserved a more detailed treatment and should include Paul's interaction with early Jewish exegesis!
- confessional affirmations and the use of other traditional material
- 'remnant theology and rhetoric' – what one would expect is a discussion of all of Romans 9-11; on this issue it is naive simply to summarise on four pages an entry of the TDNT IV, originally published in 1942
- some larger 'underlying narratives' in Romans – the discussion is rather general and, surprisingly, ignores Paul's references to Israel's past in Romans 4, 9 and 11.

Part four is devoted to textual and interpretive concerns. The discussion of text critical issues is rather general and misses some crucial issues (chapter 16 as part of the original letter, the various doxologies in chs. 15-16). Longenecker considers the major interpretive approaches prominent today to be the righteousness of God and righteousness, justification and faith, 'in Christ' and 'Christ by his Spirit in us', the *pistis Jesou Christou*-theme, the new perspective on Paul, issues of honour and shame, and reconciliation and peace. Among the common interpretive approaches are also various anti-imperial readings of Romans (Georgi, Wright, Elliott). Even if one does not agree with this approach it deserves to be mentioned. (For a critical survey see S. Kim, *Christ and Caesar: The Gospel and the Roman Empire in the Writings of Luke and Paul*, Grand Rapids, Cambridge, UK: Eerdmans, 2008, 16-21, 36-43.)

The *final part* first discusses the focus and central thrust of the letter as seen in Romans 1:18–3:20, 3:21–4:25 and 5:1–8:39. This procedure is reminiscent of the typical Protestant (Lutheran) emphasis on the first eight chapters; the focus and central thrust of Romans 9–11 and 12:1–15:13 are apparently less important. A final, substantial chapter surveys the structure and argument of the whole letter (are these really ‘critical issues’?). Each of the eleven chapters closes with a bibliography. The volume contains an index of authors (providing access to the various bibliographies) and sources.

Longenecker provides a solid survey of many critical issues in Romans. The volume is a helpful companion to the German survey of Michael Theobald (*Der Römerbrief*, EdF 294; Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2000) and a supplement in comprehensiveness and scope to the introductory section of Robert Jewett’s recent magisterial *Hermeneia* commentary on Romans (Minneapolis: Fortress: 2007).

In view of some recent research on Romans, the sections on the use of ancient rhetoric and modern rhetorical analysis could be stronger. In addition, the detailed and nuanced debate about Romans 9–11 in recent years deserved more attention; for a survey see F. Wilk and J. R. Wagner (eds.), *Between Gospel and Election: Explorations in the Interpretation of Romans 9–11*, WUNT 257; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010; and on Romans 14–15 e.g. V. Gäckle, M. Reasoner, C. N. Toney. A volume of this kind should probably also include a brief survey of the history of interpretation of Romans (see M. Reasoner).

For detailed treatment of others issues and a final assessment of Longenecker’s own approach, readers will have to wait for his commentary. The present volume is valuable for scholars and students alike in what it offers, but insufficient as a balanced treatment of all recent critical issues. Often rather dated literature is adduced for the various positions; a number of important recent monographs do not appear, e.g., R. Bell, J. Flebbe, S. Gathercole, K. Haacker and U. Schnelle.

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Zeugnis, Einladung, Bekehrung: Mission in Christentum und Islam

Theologisches Forum Christentum – Islam

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ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Der vorliegende Sammelband betrachtet die christliche Mission und den islamischen *da’wa* (Ruf/Einladung) aus christlicher und islamischer Perspektive. Der Band geht auf eine gemeinsame Tagung zurück und vertritt europäische Positionen insbesondere aus dem deutschen Sprachraum. Nach Einführung werden theologische und hermeneutische Fragen, historische Beispiele und Vergleichsmöglichkeiten diskutiert, sowie das Verhältnis zwischen Glaubenswerbung in beiden Traditionen und Pluralismus, Religionsfreiheit, Konversion und Dialog.

SUMMARY

This volume of essays deals with the Christian mission and the Islamic *da’wa* (call, invitation) from the perspective of both religions. Based on a conference held in the south of Germany in 2010, it includes European views, in particular from the German speaking countries. Theological and hermeneutical as well as historical examples and comparisons are discussed first. The subsequent parts of the book deal with the relationship between propaganda in both traditions, pluralism, freedom of religion, (the legitimacy of) conversion, and dialogue. The contributors are scholars, not practitioners, who reject direct missionary activity. Yet this is an important and relevant volume.

RÉSUMÉ

Cet ouvrage traite de la mission chrétienne et du *da’wa* (« appel, invitation ») islamique en se plaçant du point de vue de chacune des deux religions. Il reprend les exposés donnés par des orateurs européens, venant en particulier de pays germanophones, lors d’une conférence qui s’est tenue dans le sud de l’Allemagne en 2010. On y trouve d’abord des exemples et comparaisons dans les domaines théologique, herméneutique et historique. Le reste du livre s’intéresse à la relation entre la propagande dans les deux traditions, au pluralisme, à la liberté religieuse (la légitimité de la conversion) et au dialogue. Les auteurs appartiennent au milieu académique. Ils ne sont pas des praticiens et rejettent l’activité missionnaire directe. L’ouvrage est néanmoins important et pertinent.

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Dieser Band geht auf die sechste gemeinsame christlich-muslimische Tagung des *Theologischen Forums Christentum – Islam* hervor, bei dem im März 2010 140 christliche und islamische Theologen aus zehn verschiedenen Ländern an der Akademie der Diözese Rottenburg-Stuttgart über das Verständnis und die Praxis von