

1. The Approach of the Commentary

This commentary employs all of the standard methods of historical-critical exegesis. This includes historical analysis; text criticism, form criticism, and redaction criticism; rhetorical analysis; social scientific reconstruction of the audience situation; an historical reconstruction of the situations in Rome and Spain, historical and cultural analysis of the honor, shame, and imperial systems in the Greco-Roman world; and a theological interpretation that takes these details into account rather than following traditional paths formed by church traditions. 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. In the effort to follow Paul's attempt to persuade and transform the Roman congregations, one should bring to bear all of the available historical and cultural information. So the first matter on which an accounting should be given is the nature of the commentary's approach to the stubborn details of history and culture.

A. Practical Realism and Historical-Critical Methods

The interpretation of each verse in this commentary rests on a particular view of the historical situation of the letter and its recipients. Although the methods of historical-critical research are generally understood,¹ their use has come increasingly under criticism in recent decades.² Every branch of interpretive and historical study has had to confront these methodological issues. In *Telling the Truth about History*, Joyce Appleby, Lynn Hunt, and Margaret Jacob advocate a “democratic practice of history” that encourages “skepticism about dominant views, but at the same time sustains “trust in the reality of the past and its knowability.”³ They propose “practical realism” in the use of interpretive methods, an approach that aptly expresses the method of this commentary.⁴ They acknowledge that there can never be a “precise fit between what is in the human head and what is out there” in the real world.⁵ But they reject both the extremes of historical positivism and postmodernist relativism while criticizing the assumption that there must be an “enduring dichotomy between absolute objectivity and totally arbitrary interpretations of the world of objects.”⁶ Historians and interpreters must struggle for the truth while recognizing that each is “an agent who actually moulds how the past is to be seen.”⁷ Historical reconstruction is an essential dimension of interpretation.⁸ Yet the stubborn contours of the evidence about the past must constantly be respected. Practical realism appreciates scientific advances because they reflect the awareness that the world does not always conform to our previously held convictions. Appleby, Hunt, and Jacob

1 See, e.g., Krentz, *Method*, 33–88; Zimmermann, *Methodenlehre*, 17–49, 77–84, 125–78, 215–37, 267–79; Riedlinger et al., *Historisch-kritische Methode*, 54–71; Tuckett, *Interpretation*, 41–187; Brown, *Introduction*, 3–47; Branick, *Introduction*, 5–19; Söding and Münch, *Methodenbuch*, 16–80, 221–304; Marquerat et al., *Introduction*, 139–58; Ehrman, *Historical Introduction*, 13–15, 260–75; Ebner and Heininger, *Exegese*, 1–24, 157–65, 205–18, 325–45, 347–59; Silva, *Introduction*, 219–26, 258–66, 370–77, 438–44, 463–71, 477–79, 508–17, 531–34, 578–85, 629–30, 703–13, 800–805, 831–38, 858–60, 879–81, 908–11; Holladay, *Critical Introduction*, 16–24, 39–57, 227–40, 263–81, 348–60.

2 See Krentz, *Method*, 78–88.

3 Joyce Oldham Appleby, Lynn Hunt, and Margaret

Jacob, *Telling the Truth about History* (New York: Norton, 1994) 11.

4 Ibid., 247–51.

5 Ibid., 248; see also Krentz, *Method*, 35–47; Riedlinger et al., *Historisch-kritische Methode*, 60–61.

6 Appleby, Hunt, and Jacob, *History*, 246; see also Riedlinger et al., *Historisch-kritische Methode*, 13–14.

7 Appleby, Hunt, and Jacob, *History*, 249.

8 See Söding and Münch, *Methodenbuch*, 38, 52–54, 275–94; Ehrman, *Historical Introduction*, 14.

advocate a “new theory of objectivity” that respects the fact that knowledge seeking always involves a lively process of “contentious struggle between diverse groups of truth-seekers.”⁹ They define historical objectivity as “an interactive relationship between an inquiring subject and an external object.”¹⁰ This resonates with David Hackett Fischer’s critique of inductive as well as deductive reasoning in historical research; he proposes a form of adductive reasoning that accepts the constant interaction between the interpreter and historical evidence.¹¹

Although Appelby, Hunt, and Jacob are critical of Karl Popper’s tendency toward “metaphysical realism,”¹² I continue to accept his conviction that historical research is similar to scientific research in other fields in needing to rely on a system of conjectures and refutations, in which hypotheses “are not *derived* from observed facts, but *invented* in order to account for them.”¹³ The generalizations in this introduction, therefore, are “conjectures” and “hypotheses,” despite the fact that they are widely accepted by reliable historians and commentators.¹⁴

A recognition of the tentative nature of all historical and interpretive work is particularly required for a commentary on Romans, because the tendency has been to burden each word and phrase in this letter with theological content held with absolute certainty by particular churches and groups. The result is that an anti-imperial-

istic letter comes to be overlaid with unacknowledged ideologies, with individual portions understood as embodying the theology of particular traditions, now refied under the canonical aegis of the apostle to the Gentiles, and hence rendered authoritative for all others. The transforming gospel about God’s righteousness regaining control of all disobedient persons and institutions by overturning their guises of superior honor is thus domesticated into an ideology favoring one side or another in long-standing theological battles, with various kinds of culturally conditioned, hegemonic agendas inserted into the interpretive process. The message of Romans is thus transformed into a new kind of theological law, producing bondage just as inexorably as Paul argues it always does.¹⁵ At the same time, the distinctive historical and social background of the Roman audience and Paul’s rhetorical purpose in addressing them are typically dealt with in the introductions to Romans commentaries but play virtually no role in the interpretive process.

The sociohistorical and rhetorical approach of this commentary¹⁶ is designed to allow this process to come to light and to be overcome as far as possible. First, in eschewing a totally objective hermeneutic, I need to acknowledge my own methodological presuppositions to alert readers to the possibility of another biased reading of Romans. Second, by recovering the argument implicit

9 Appleby, Hunt, and Jacob, *History*, 254.

10 Ibid., 259; see also Brown, *Introduction*, 35; Krentz, *Method*, 47: “The historian has balance and humility. He knows and states, without apology, that his work does not have the objectivity of the natural sciences. He is as skeptical and critical of himself as he is of his sources, for he knows the gaps in the documents and his own tendency to ignore the data that do not fit his own reconstruction.”

11 Fischer, *Historians’ Fallacies*, xv, 38–39, 314–18. See also Krentz, *Method*, 46–47; Söding and Münch, *Methodenbuch*, 224–31.

12 Appleby, Hunt, and Jacob, *History*, 170.

13 Cited in Jewett, *Chronology*, 3, from Carl G. Hempel, *Philosophy of Natural Science* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1966) 15; see also Popper, *Conjectures and Refutations*, 15.

14 See Karl R. Popper, *The Logic of Scientific Discovery* (New York: Harper & Row, 1959) 277.

15 Thus the historical-critical method allows “the Scriptures to exercise their proper critical function

in the church” (Krentz, *Method*, 65) and the interpretation of “theological insights” (Krentz, *Method*, 67). The “sociorhetorical method” has been defined by Vernon K. Robbins in *The Tapestry of Early Christian Discourse: Rhetoric, Society and Ideology* (London: Routledge, 1996) and in *Exploring the Texture of Texts: A Guide to Socio-Rhetorical Interpretation* (Valley Forge: Trinity Press International, 1996). In contrast to Robbins’s extensive and sophisticated employment of modern literary theories, my method makes more explicit use of historical and social evidence from the ancient world. His method seems more appropriate for the analysis of narrative materials from the Gospels than for epistolary documents such as Romans that reflect a unique rhetorical situation requiring historical and social reconstruction.

in larger pericopes and major proofs, supported by stylistic and rhetorical analyses, one can develop a counterweight against the traditional views of the theology of words, phrases, and verses. The bewildering array of exegetical options developed by generations of theological and historical-critical research on Romans can thus be sorted out on the basis of which alternative fits most smoothly into the larger argument of the proof and the letter as a whole. Third, the reconstructed audience situation is consistently used to provide criteria for deciding between exegetical options: if the argument of Romans was intended to be dialectical, the option that fits most closely into the reconstructed interaction between Paul and his audience is preferable. Finally, the search for appropriate historical-religious parallels and the investigation into the earlier phases of theological debates in early Christianity reflected in Paul's wording provide resources for eliminating inappropriate exegetical options and pointing toward likely connotations of words and phrases. The linguistic, intellectual, and religious horizon of the first century can thus be used to guard against imposing later ideological agendas back onto Romans. This hermeneutical principle promises a measure of accountability and testability in discerning Paul's intended argument; readers are offered a frankly acknowledged set of hermeneutical assumptions and methods to evaluate and correct. My goal is to sharpen the ancient horizon of the text so that it can enter into dialogue with the modern horizons of our various interpretive enterprises.

B. The Structure of the Sociohistorical and Rhetorical Commentary

The commentary on each pericope begins with a translation and extensive text-critical notes that evaluate and explain various readings. As section 2 will indicate, I have concluded that Romans was originally a sixteen-chapter letter, to which two interpolations were later

attached. This text-critical work was done prior to starting the interpretive process, and it led to a number of deviations from the standard international Greek text available in the Nestle-Aland editions. The principle followed was to make text-critical decisions without allowing the interpretive consequences to influence the results. The translation is literal, aiming at offering precision rather than grace. It is not designed for liturgical use, and falls far short of the eloquence of Paul's text. The dynamic transference method would be preferable in a translation to be used in public worship or devotional reading.

A consensus crystallized in the activities of the Pauline Theology Seminars of the Society of Biblical Literature in the 1970s–90s that Romans should be viewed as a situational letter, and that historical circumstances should be taken into account just as in the other letters.¹⁷ This commentary is a result of that consensus, as sections 3, 5–8 in the introduction show. I view the argument of this letter as an attempt to persuade Roman house and tenement churches to support the Spanish mission. Thus section 4 deals with the rhetorical means of persuasion reflected in the letter, designed to appeal to the audience that Paul believes on the basis of personal contacts and hearsay evidence to be present in Rome.¹⁸ After a detailed analysis of the historical situation in Rome and of the congregations situated there in sections 5 and 6, I go on in section 7 to analyze the situation in Spain in order to clarify the conditions that Paul's mission would have had to fulfill. In contrast to many Romans commentaries that make no further use of such historical and cultural details after the introduction, I attempt to bring them into correlation with the persuasive formulation of the entire letter. This commentary therefore differs from the tradition that still dominates most scholarly studies on Romans, which continue an ancient legacy of overlooking the situational dimensions of the letter.¹⁹

17 That the other NT letters are occasional and reflect the background of audiences and senders is widely assumed; see Riedlinger et al., *Historisch-kritische Methode*, 65–67.

18 The methodological survey that comes the closest to describing the rhetorical method employed in this commentary is that of de Silva, *Introduction*, 111–44, 380–85, 438–44, 508–17, 572–74.

19 To give an example from 2004, the massive study by Dierk Starnitzke, *Struktur*, systematizes the entire argument of Romans under two aspects: the self-understanding of individual believers, and a theological, christological viewpoint (p. 7); nowhere in this 518-page book is there a discussion of the historical situation in Rome or the rhetorical situation of the letter.

There is room to disagree with the historical, social, and rhetorical premises on which this commentary rests, because “practical realism” recognizes that each interpreter actively molds the past by interpreting evidence in various ways. To put this in theological terms, we all “see through a glass darkly” and must recognize that all human knowledge is fragmentary and preliminary.²⁰ However darkly they have been grasped, these premises have led to an interpretation of the letter that differs from the one I was taught by my church and by the theological professors at Chicago and Tübingen. It is also different from the interpretation of Romans that I myself advocated through most of my teaching career. But difference is no proof of final adequacy, and the assessment of the results is left up to others. The readers of these pages are invited to enter into discussion about what Paul’s gospel really meant for his time, and to go beyond this commentary in reflecting on the question of what it might mean today.

2. Text-Critical Issues in a Sixteen-Chapter Letter

The first task in this commentary is to deal with the issues related to the text of Romans, which are among the most complicated in the field of NT study. Although certainty is never achievable in this area, the conclusions drawn from text-critical analysis become the conjectures

on which the subsequent tasks of translation, rhetorical analysis, historical reconstruction, and the exegesis of individual verses must depend. The priority of textual criticism is decisive, and it is certainly incorrect to believe that it “concerns itself with minutiae of little significance.”²¹ In the method followed in this commentary, interpretive options are not allowed to play a crucial role in making text-critical decisions.²² Such decisions take priority over any interpretive theory or theological system. Here is an account of the major issues and the conjectures on which the commentary rests.

A. The Varied Forms of Romans

Text critics have discovered fifteen different forms of Romans, including one no longer extant that is described by the church fathers.²³ Marcion excised the final two chapters so that the letter would end with 14:23, a verse congenial to his theology.²⁴ We are informed by Origen that Marcion’s edition of Romans lacked chaps. 15–16, which he “removed entirely” (*penitus abstulit*), including the doxology.²⁵ The text of Origen is as follows:

- 20 1 Cor 13:9-12; see Jewett, *Apostle to America*, 98–111.
- 21 J. K. Elliott, *Essays and Studies in New Testament Textual Criticism*, EFN 3 (Cordoba: Ediciones El Almendro, 1992) 17.
- 22 On the methodological issue of “factual verification,” see Fischer, *Historians’ Fallacies*, 40–63.
- 23 See Gamble, *Textual History*, 15–36; Aland, *Entwürfe*, 286–91; Lampe, “Textgeschichte,” 273–77. For an earlier account of this textual variety, see Peter Corssen, “Zur Überlieferungsgeschichte des Römerbriefes,” ZNW 10 (1909) 1–45, 97–102.
- 24 Donatien de Bruyne, “Les deux derniers chapitres de la lettre aux Romains,” RBén 25 (1908) 423–30; idem, “La finae marcionite de la lettre aux Romains retrouvée,” RBén 28 (1911) 133–42; Corssen, “Überlieferungsgeschichte,” 42–45; Adolf von Harnack, “Über I Kor. 14,32ff. und Röm. 16,25ff. nach der ältesten Überlieferung und der marcionitischen Bibel,” in *Studien zur Geschichte des Neuen Testaments und der Alten Kirche. I. Zur neutestamentlichen Textkritik* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1931) 180–90; Zuntz, *Text*, 227–28; Manson, “Romans and Others,” 8–11; Karl P. Donfried, “A Short Note on Romans 16,” in Donfried, *Romans Debate*, 50; John J. Clabeaux, *A Lost Edition of the Letters of Paul: A Reassessment of the Text of the Pauline Corpus Attested by Marcion* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic Biblical Association, 1989) 3; Walker, *Interpolations*, 198. The study by Alain Le Boulluec, “The Bible in Use Among the Marginally Orthodox,” in P. M. Blowers, ed., *The Bible in Greek Antiquity*, Bible through the Ages 1 (Notre Dame: Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 1997) 199–200, provides an account of other Marcionite mutilations of the Pauline letters.
- 25 Bacon, “Doxology,” 170.

Caput hoc Marcion, a quo scripturae evangelicae atque apostolicae interpolatae sunt, de hac epistula penitus abstulit: et non solum hoc, sed et ab eo loco ubi scriptum est “omne autem, quod non est ex fide, peccatum est” [Rom 14:23] usque ad finem cuncta dissecuit. In alilis vero exemplaribus, id est in his, quae non sunt a Marcione temerata, hoc ipsum caput diverse positum invenimus: in nonnullis etenim codicibus post eum locus quem supra diximus, hos est “ei autem, qui potens est vos confirmare” [Rom 16:25]; alli vero codices in fine id, ut nunc est positum, continent. (“This person Marcion, from whom gospel and apostolic scriptures have been falsified, took out the innermost part of this epistle: and not only this, but also from that place where it is written, ‘because everything that is not from faith is sin’ [Rom 14:23] up to the end, he cut out the whole thing. In other copies, furthermore, that is, in these that have not been corrupted by Marcion, we have discovered with this chapter a different situation: indeed, in not a few codices, following that place which we have spoken about above, this is written: ‘But to him who is able to establish you’ [Rom 16:25]; however, other codices, as in the present situation retain it at the end.”)²⁶

The question that arises from Origen’s statement is whether the doxology was actually present in the version of Romans that Marcion mutilated. From the viewpoint of Origen’s time period, and the texts available to him, the doxology was visible after 14:23 and 16:23, and thus he assumes that Marcion must have deleted it along with the rest of chaps. 15–16. However, Lietzmann’s reading of the evidence remains plausible to many commentators in suggesting that the original form of Romans lacked the doxology, and that it was first added “by Mar-

cionite circles” to the fourteen-chapter letter, which at that time otherwise lacked an ending.²⁷ This matches the text-critical analysis by Peter Lampe, that the original form of Romans consisted of 1:1–16:23 + 16:24; that Marcion deleted chaps. 15–16 in their entirety; and that the new ending of 16:25–27 was added thereafter.²⁸ This explains why some texts have only 1:1–14:23 + 16:25–27 and why other text types have 16:25–27 in various locations.²⁹

Kurt Aland provided a comprehensive analysis of the different forms of Romans and grouped them together as families that descended from one another in genealogical fashion.³⁰ His chart that shows the genealogy of the fifteen text types is printed below (see p. 6), employing the following symbols:

- A = Rom 1:1–14:23
- B = Rom 15:1–16:23
- B¹ = Rom 15:1–33
- B² = Rom 16:1–23
- C = Rom 16:24
- C¹ = Rom 16:24 (in abbreviated form)
- D = 16:25–27

This chart shows that in contrast to earlier assessments, the Marcionite shortening of Romans is only one of three different strands of tradition present at the beginning of the second century. While it led to the complicated versions visible on the left arm of the genealogy, it cannot account for the full spectrum of variations. A weakness in Aland’s genealogy was identified by Lampe,³¹ namely that the original form is purely hypothetical, which is why Aland placed it in square brackets. No text of Romans currently extant consists of 1:1–14:23 + 15:1–16:23, and it is also odd that a Pauline

26 Origen *Com. Rom.* 10.43 (PG 14.1290 A-B); Lietzmann, 130, cites this as coming from 7,453 Lo.

27 Lietzmann, 131; see also Clabeaux, *Marcion*. For a discussion of the complex issue of the “original text,” see Eldon Jay Epp, “The Multivalence of the Term ‘Original Text’ in New Testament Textual Criticism,” *HTR* 92 (1999) 245–81, repr. in Epp, *Perspectives on New Testament Textual Criticism: Collected Essays, 1962–2004*, NovTSup 116 (Leiden: Brill, 2005) 551–93.

28 Lampe, “Textgeschichte,” 273–75; for a similar hypothesis see Trobisch, *Entstehung*, 75–79.

29 This assessment corrects earlier views such as Manson, “Romans—and Others,” 12, that the original form of the letter sent to Rome comprised chaps. 1–15 without the doxology. For a claim that Marcion was not responsible for the excision of the final chapters, see Schmidt, *Marcion*, 239–40. Aland, *Entwürfe*, 287–91.

30 Lampe, “Textgeschichte,” 273.