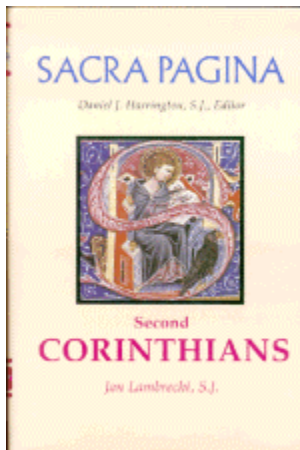


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Lambrecht, Jan

Second Corinthians

Sacra Pagina 8

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For more than two centuries, scholars have debated the integrity of 2 Corinthians. Unfortunately, no consensus has materialized that precisely delineates the original shape of its individual pieces. Nevertheless, most scholars now admit that the document as it stands does not work as a single unit. With very few exceptions, even the most cautious academics acknowledge the necessity of separating at least the last four chapters of 2 Corinthians from the earlier nine. Less wary scholars, including such notable figures as Hans Dieter Betz and Helmut Koester, have argued that as many as five letters plus a non-Pauline fragment constitute what we now know as 2 Corinthians.

Jan Lambrecht, in his new commentary, stands apart from the majority. He rejects the various division hypotheses and aligns himself with the very few individuals who see in 2 Corinthians a single, unified letter. Despite his insistence on the unity of the letter, however, Lambrecht spends little time arguing in favor of his position in his commentary. For instance, when discussing 2 Corinthians 8—which some regard as an independent letter—Lambrecht states that "serious objections must be voiced" against such a position. The reader expects a point-by-point rebuttal to follow. But that rebuttal never appears. The few reasons that he gives for accepting the unity of the letter are neither new nor persuasive. As a result, he never effectively demonstrates the coherence of the letter as it stands. Instead of arguing *for* the unity of the letter, he spends most of his energy arguing *against* dividing the letter.

Lambrecht's major objections to the division hypotheses are three in number. First, he argues that there is nothing in the text tradition to support the division of the letter. Second, he contends that the hypotheses that must be constructed to account for the later redaction of the various letter fragments into 2 Corinthians are not persuasive. Finally, Lambrecht maintains that modern readers demand too great a consistency from the apostle.

His first objection can be (and has been) countered by simply postulating the redaction of the fragments into one document at a time earlier than any of the extant manuscripts of 2 Corinthians. This, indeed, would not have to be all that early, given the amount of time that passed between Paul's writing and our earliest textual witness of 2 Corinthians.

Lambrecht's second objection to the division hypothesis hardly helps his case because it can quite easily be turned back on him. Lambrecht lays the burden of proof on the scholar who would divide the letter. Those who would read it as it stands, he implies, need little justification for their position. This might be an acceptable rule of thumb in most situations, but, in the case of 2 Corinthians, there are two strong arguments against it. First, the majority of scholars would divide the letter. As a result, the burden of proof could be put upon those opposing that majority opinion. Second (and more importantly), reading 2 Corinthians as a whole is so difficult that any scholar who upholds the unity of the letter must provide a way of adequately reading it as a coherent whole. In short, the burden of proof is on all parties.

Lambrecht's third objection, that modern scholars demand too great a consistency from the apostle, need not be argued extensively. Although some scholars might demand too great a consistency from Paul, most would settle for any kind of consistency between, for instance, the conciliatory tone of the early chapters and the sarcastic and aggressive tenor of the later.

Despite the problems that arise from Lambrecht's insistence on the unity of 2 Corinthians, his work is otherwise impressive. His verse-by-verse exegesis of each pericope (in the sections entitled "Notes") is particularly helpful in navigating a document that is frequently both grammatically and textually challenging. Since the commentary series in which Lambrecht's book appears prohibits lengthy discussions on the history of scholarship, Lambrecht spends more time than most commentaries on the text itself and less time arguing against previous interpretations. This shift in focus provides a welcome relief, especially in a field that typically revels in surveying such scholarship in painstaking detail.

Lambrecht's broader explanations of each pericope (in the sections entitled "Interpretation") are also quite helpful. One particularly noteworthy discussion in his "Interpretation" section appears in the explanation of 2 Cor 4:6-5:10. In this section,

Lambrecht not only discusses the eschatological expectations that Paul articulates in 2 Corinthians 4-5; he also discusses the evolution of the apostle's eschatological expectation. In other words, he brings the text of 2 Corinthians into the context of the larger Pauline corpus, allowing the reader to see the development of Paul's thinking about the end. Lambrecht, to his credit, resists the temptation to collapse the eschatological distinctions that stand between the various letters. In sum, while the commentary does not adequately account for the overall structure of 2 Corinthians, it is quite good when looking at the text verse by verse and section by section.

Who will most benefit from this commentary? Curiously, the book seems to target two different audiences at the same time. The sections entitled "Interpretation" are clear and to the point, and carefully guide the reader through the complex argumentation of the different sections of the letter. This makes this a solid resource for undergraduate students or the general public. The fact that the whole book is concise also will appeal to these people. On the other hand, the more detailed "Notes" sections are beyond the reach of the typical undergraduate or anyone who is not well-grounded in the Greek New Testament. These sections of the commentary will appeal more to seminarians, graduate students, and scholars.