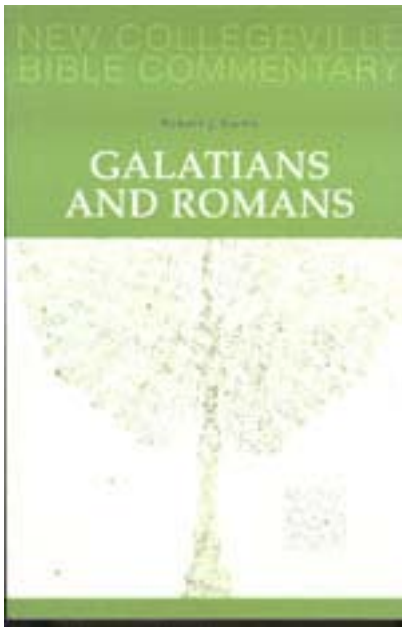


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Karris, Robert J.

Galatians and Romans

New Collegeville Bible Commentary

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Mark Reasoner
Bethel College
St. Paul, MN 55112

This slim volume is well written for the purposes of this series. With the text of the letters on the upper half of the pages (New American Bible) and Karris's commentary on the lower half of the pages, lay readers and undergraduates will have maximum exposure to the texts of these two letters of Paul while being guided by the wisdom of a solid exegete and master teacher. In both the Galatians and Romans sections of this commentary, Karris consistently identifies Paul's use of *pathos*, *ethos*, and *logos* in his argumentative strategies.

Karris's Galatians section (5–34) follows Martyn in viewing the letter as driven by an apocalyptic worldview and is open to the insights of Dunn's new perspective. Karris goes with a North Galatian destination for the letter and uses Martyn's "teachers" and Nanos's "influencers" as descriptors for the opponents whose teaching Paul confronts. Throughout the Galatian section there is a healthy emphasis on how Paul is writing for a community of believers, such as "Christians are free to form an inclusive community (3:26–28)." The reader is thus helpfully pushed beyond an individualistic reading of the letter.

While utilizing the new perspective, Karris does not limit himself to this perspective. He notes that in Gal 1-2, the phrase "works of the law" seems to refer to the dividing issues

of circumcision, food laws, and calendar, but he goes on to observe that chapters 3–4 of the letter seem more understandable when taking “works of the law” to mean keeping the law (17).

Karris is fully in control of the issues to be considered in the text. Though the NAB text that the commentary series is required to use goes with the objective genitive of *pistis Christou*, Karris offers the subjective genitive as definitely part of the question both here in the Galatians section and in the Romans section that follows. Karris is fully on board with Martyn’s apocalyptic reading of Galatians. In most cases this reading makes sense, although I found it difficult to see on first reading how in 6:7–9 “Paul again reveals the apocalyptic bent of this theology” (33).

The Romans commentary within this volume (35–96) is a rhetorically sensitive, Israel-Gentiles centered reading of the letter. With regard to his rhetorical sensitivity, Karris does a good job at prompting readers to read the text closely, often calling them to note the first-person plural pronouns where Paul is including himself with the readers, elsewhere noting the first-person singular where Paul is writing with *pathos*. He highlights the questions and use of diatribe in the letter, with understandable and useful descriptions of Paul’s rhetorical strategies that are indebted to Stanley Stowers.

Romans is all about God’s relationship with Jews and Gentiles, according to Karris: “in Romans Paul is concerned with God and how justification by faith for both Gentiles and Jews accords with God’s earlier choice of Israel as God’s special people” (71). This makes the commentary very effective in accounting for Paul’s focus on corporate Israel and the Gentiles in the light of his gospel.

On 3:21–26, Karris helpfully sees more than one analogy at work; he offers both ransom and expiation as operative (53). His outline of the diatribe in 3:27–4:2 is also very helpful (54). On Rom 4–5 Karris shows sympathy with narrative-based approaches to Romans, although he never attempts to read the whole letter as based on an underlying narrative (56, 61).

As would be expected from a Catholic commentator, Karris is especially strong in his exegesis of chapter 6. His exegetical move of glossing “slavery” with “addiction” works very well for Rom 6; it will allow the book’s audience to engage fully with the text here. On Rom 7, Karris follows Stowers and identifies the speaker as “the Gentile striving to attain self-mastery by means of observance of the Mosaic law” (65).

With regard to Rom 9–11, Karris helpfully draws readers’ attention to Paul’s scriptural citations and links sections together by noting how the themes of “call,” “remnant,” and

“word” organize the chapters. This is a useful survey of Paul’s concern for his people that reads the salvation of ethnic Israel as the final scene of the drama. Karris is not afraid to tell the reader his own position on exegetical and theological questions. Still, he also has the wisdom to conclude tentatively where the text leaves certain questions open, such as on the balance of “universality and particularity” in 11:25–32 (80).

Karris’s ability to help the reader see connections between separate parts of Romans is especially strong at 12:1–15:13. He helpfully connects the improper worship of 1:25 with the proper worship of 12:1. Not often emphasized but very valuable is Karris’s identification of the “age” of 12:2 as forming an *inclusio* with the eschatological material at 13:11–14 (83). Karris also has a good sense of the Pauline corpus, connecting Rom 12:3–21 with 1 Cor 12–14, which also juxtaposes a description of the body of Christ with an emphasis on love (83–84). On Rom 13:1–7 Karris provides good insight as to how the paragraph is connected to what immediately precedes it. The parallel he draws with Wis 6:3 on God as the source of all authority is worthwhile. Karris also has the wisdom to see that Rom 13:1–7 does not sanction a blind obedience to whatever a government decrees.

On Rom 14:1–15:13 Karris remains consistent with a position he published earlier, that the disagreement Paul addresses is not an actual situation in the Roman churches. Paul’s counsel here provides principles for believers to use whatever the specific *adiaphora* that might be dividing a community. While this may be the minority position now, Karris does a good job in arguing how this section of Romans is more ambiguous than Galatians or 1 Corinthians, so that we cannot say what was happening in the Roman churches as certainly as we can for Galatia and Corinth.

Karris does a good job helping readers understand what is unique about the conclusion of Romans. He highlights the number of house churches and women who are greeted in chapter 16. Except for his treatment of 16:25–27 as Pauline, the exegesis of the 15:14–16:27 is solid.

Short bibliographies for his discussions of Galatians and Romans follow (97–98), then a section of “Review Aids and Discussion Topics.” These are well-conceived questions that will help readers engage fully with Paul and the commentary (99–103). The index of citations from the “Catechism of the Catholic Church” will be especially valuable for Catholic readers (105–6). The book is winsomely ecumenical, however. I would like to use it as a textbook in a Life and Teachings of Paul class for undergraduates in my Protestant setting.

Karris has succeeded in delivering the best of contemporary scholarship for lay readers. Liturgical Press is also to be thanked for publishing the commentary in such a reader-

friendly format with clear headings and some photographs of Paul's world. This book will serve scripture readers in the church and at undergraduate institutions very well.