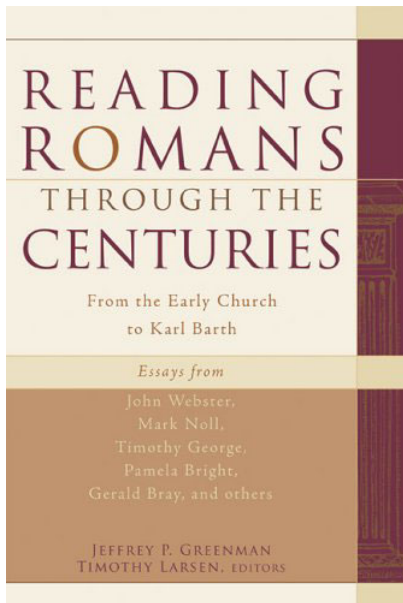


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**Larsen, Timothy, and Jeffrey P. Greenman, eds.**

***Reading Romans through the Centuries: From the Early Church to Karl Barth***

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The volume is rich and substantial. It begins with Gerald Bray's account of Ambrosiaster and his commentary in which the influential ideas of *massa damnata* and substitutionary atonement are mixed with Eastern ideas of the human race sharing the natural death but not the guilt of Adam. Bray has obviously worked closely with the text of this commentary and knows it well. However, it is not entirely clear from this account whether his preference for the Western reading of Rom 5:12 ("death reigned over those whose sins were like the sin of Adam") had anything to do with a parting of the ways between East and West in the person of Ambrosiaster. Some guidance toward useful secondary literature would have been welcome.

Christopher Hall explains that John Chrysostom's theology made sure that grace never overrode human freedom, although without going into much detail. The point is that there is grace not to sin with our choosing. The Parable of the Prodigal Son in which the son chose to return is set against any "predeterminist" view of the message of Romans. This treatment does not really convince me of Chrysostom's theological skill, but the presentation is comprehensively done.

The chapter on Augustine by Pamela Bright is a bit disappointing. The great theologian seems to have left Romans as a whole behind after the 390s, in a way he never did with, say, John's Gospel. All we have as a commentary is on the first seven verses. A focus on passages from Romans in the anti-Pelagian works might have been more fruitful, instead of the brief section of one page. Instead, the high point is the use of Romans (7:17 and 12:2—but what about 13:13–14?). All in all, one senses a lack of focus and perspective in this essay.

Steven Boguslawski in dealing with Aquinas on Romans concentrates on Rom 9–11, which, he argues, Thomas took to be the heart of the Epistle. We are told how the *Commentary* relied on the groundwork of the *Summa* Ia 23's own exegesis. The upshot is that the Jews as a people have a place in the triumphal outworking of salvation history but not in any eternal sense.

Tim George does a fine job of relating the story of how Luther's lectures on Romans were lost until discovered by Denifle in the Vatican (among the loot from the Heidelberg library captured at the start of the Thirty Years' War). Luther's full scholia and notes on the text show a Christocentric reading and a care for biblical theology, but then we are cast back to consider how Luther was still operating with notions of covenant in his Psalms lectures for the breakthrough to occur only with these Romans lectures. The themes of humility and *Gelassenheit* and the idea that the elect, not the damned, are those who know how to tremble show a Luther still in thrall to an Augustinian paradigm that would not be abandoned until 1521, although George does not explore why this was. This is, in all, a well-researched piece that is at home with the secondary literature.

Jeff Greenman advances the thesis, already promoted by Carl Trueman, that William Tyndale gave a Reformed spin to the content of Luther's prefaces on Romans. The idea is that the Christian receives love unto the law in his or her conversion. With one eye on antinomianism, Tyndale insisted that the gospel is against outward good works but not internally motivated heart-felt works of love. Attention is paid to key verses such as Rom 5:5 and 13:10, such that, had he lived, Tyndale might have turned out to be a closer reader of texts than Luther. This sounds like Calvin! The actual chapter on that Genevan exegete by David Demson is disappointingly a paraphrase of the Romans commentary, a work that is already in translation.

John Wesley, according to Victor Shepherd, saw the Epistle to the Romans (especially in ch. 7) as backing up the moral law that antedated that of Moses. The Decalogue is for sluggish people, but the law of God written on the heart is the love of Christ. Christ is the substance of God's law as the mirror image of God's holiness, an image that shares the substance of that which it reflects. This chapter at times wanders quite far from Romans,

(e.g., an extended discussion of 2 Cor 4:6), but to be fair, that is Wesley's wandering, and Shepherd is merely following his charge.

Mark Noll gives us a masterly account of Charles Hodge, presenting him as learned, provoked by New Yale theology in the shape of Moses Stuart's 1832 Romans commentary, which, with lashings of common-sense theology, denied imputation of sin and solidarity with Adam (at most, the progenitor exerted a bad influence, despite the philosophical defense of this given by Jonathan Edwards a century before.) Hodge, encouraged by his mentor Tholuck, went back to Augustinian reading, which made him renounce Edwards's "Platonist" theory and by-pass even Calvin. There is the interesting, ironic sentence: "In Germany, the subjection of the bible to philosophy has come to an end" (181.) Noll helpfully tells us that the discussion of 5:12–21 occupies more than 11 percent of the commentary, during which he labored to speak of the corruption in human nature.

On (Bishop) J. W. Colenso, Timothy Larsen shows how it was the continuous emphasizing of universal salvation as the key to Paul's message that got the bishop of Natal into trouble in a climate already hostile to *Essays and Reviews*. For him, Paul did not say that "All who are being led by God's Spirit, *they* and none other, are the Sons of God" (193–94). Hell is only really purgatory. The Jews were the Calvinists of their day who would limit salvation. Christ did not die in anyone's stead. Some of the Victorian reviews of Colenso are worth hearing for their wit, but there is not a lot about Romans in this, and it would seem that it was more the work on the Pentateuch that sealed his doom and excommunication, but Larsen does not clarify this.

John Webster sympathetically presents Barth's view that a commentary allows a theologian the most chance of listening to a text without imposing themes or *loci* upon it. And of course in the *Römerbrief* Barth declared that Paul spoke not just as a child of his age but as a prophet and apostle. Barth was premodern in that the grammatical literal sense mattered most but was less concerned with what the text might mean in light of a better understanding of the times. Barth praised Calvin for wrestling until the walls of the centuries became transparent. In a closing sentence that is suggestive of Webster's own position, we learn: "Barth worked on the assumption that exegesis solves theological problems, and that the necessary conceptual work of dogmatics serves, and does not transcend exegesis" (222). Webster notes how, sadly, the commentary has fallen out of being part of intellectual, if not academic, discourse. Webster wants to free Barth's *Römerbrief* (note how it is often referred to rather than as *Römerbrief-Kommentar*) from being valued as a culture-historical artifact: he is not really interested in Barth for Barth's sake and will not trouble about the changes between the first and second editions. Of course, most people think that Barth's Romans commentary has precious little to do with Romans, even if it is theological ("God is God") or philosophical (expressionist). This

annoyed Barth (in 1932), and it perplexes Webster who (with McCormack) thinks it is important to view Barth's own development as organic rather than metamorphic. Nicely done, but a little more of Barth's exegesis (and rhetoric) on display would have been still nicer!

One is left sated by this volume's weight of content, yet some problems niggle. There is a sense that we have not really met Romans, let alone heard Paul. There is not really enough exegesis on display compared to material on the lives, times, theologies, and controversies of the commentators. It would be churlish to point to any idiosyncrasy in a selection of "readers of Romans," but the volume does lack coherence. It offers something suggestive, appetizing, yet without itself pointing the way to the main course. In filling us up, it perhaps is in danger of malnourishing us.