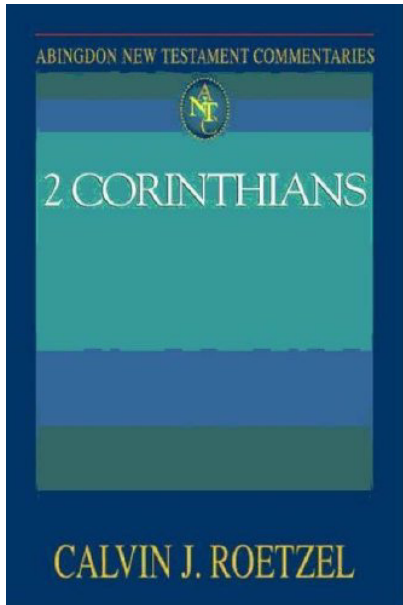


RBL 06/2008



Roetzel, Calvin J.

2 Corinthians

Abingdon New Testament Commentaries

Nashville: Abingdon, 2007. Pp. 189. Paper. \$21.00. ISBN 0687056772.

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Calvin J. Roetzel, the Arnold H. Lowe Professor of Religious Studies at Macalester College in St. Paul, Minnesota, is one of the most distinguished Pauline scholars in the United States, and his introductory volume on Paul, *The Letters of Paul: Conversations in Context*, has been a staple in colleges and seminaries for several years. It is an honor, then, to have been asked to review his commentary on 2 Corinthians, even though he and I have come to different conclusions about the literary integrity of 2 Corinthians—a fact of which the readers of this review should be aware. Whereas I have argued for the literary integrity of 2 Corinthians, Professor Roetzel maintains that 2 Corinthians is a composite of five letters. Although I am not persuaded by his arguments, the case he makes has a new twist (placing 2 Cor 8 at the beginning of the sequence), is interesting, and deserves a fair hearing. Before proceeding further, however, it will be helpful to say something about the series to which his commentary belongs.

Although the volumes of the Abingdon New Testament Commentaries series are geared to theological students, their audience also includes upper-level college students as well as pastors and church leaders. Thus the series has a rather broad audience in view, the kind of readership for which Roetzel has written so effectively in the past. His writing style, which is always crisp, clear, and engaging, does not fail him here. The intended audience

of this series will have little difficulty following his line of argument, and it will certainly find an engaging portrait of Paul within these pages. The introduction, however, in which Roetzel discusses the various partition theories of 2 Corinthians will be beyond most college students, unless they already have a strong background in Paul.

The commentary section of the Abingdon series consists of three parts: (1) a literary analysis that attends to genre; (2) an exegetical analysis of the leading ideas of the unit; and (3) and a theological and ethical analysis of the unit. The scope and nature of the Abingdon series, then, focuses on the overall movement of the text and its leading ideas rather than on a minute philological analysis. As a commentary series, it is user-friendly. Roetzel's commentary, which is less than two hundred pages, can be read from start to finish in a day or so.

Roetzel is careful to attend to the specifications of the series. While he is not inattentive to the theological and ethical dimensions of the text, his commentary tends to give more attention to reconstructing the story behind the text in order to help his readers understand why Paul wrote as he did. This ability to get in back of the text and help the reader hear Paul's voice anew is the strength of this work.

After a brief introduction to Corinth and Paul's mission to that city, Roetzel introduces his readers to the complicated question of the letter's composition. He begins with the arguments for literary integrity and finds himself agreeing with the words of Johannes Weiss: "I must confess I cannot convince myself that all of Paul's correspondence is preserved for us in its original form in these two letters [1 and 2 Corinthians]" (26). Next, he considers the two-Letter hypothesis, which has been developed in two directions: 2 Cor 10-13 were composed before 2 Cor 1-9; and 2 Cor 10-13 represent a second letter composed after 2 Cor 1-9.

Roetzel then introduces Johannes Weiss's three-letter Hypothesis. According to this hypothesis, 2 Cor 8 was written shortly after 1 Cor 16:1-4. Next, Paul wrote his "letters of tears" (2:14-7:4 [minus 6:14-7:1] and 2 Cor 10-13). Then he composed his letter of reconciliation (1:1-2:13; 7:5-16). Building upon this hypothesis, which places 2 Cor 8 at the beginning of the sequence, Roetzel draws upon the work of Günther Bornkamm and Margaret Mitchell and proposes the following five-letter hypothesis.

1. Paul writes 2 Cor 8, a letter carried by Titus and the anonymous brother to complete the collection for the church of Jerusalem, but this effort fails and Paul learns that the Corinthians have become suspicious of his conduct and fitness for ministry.

2. Paul writes 2 Cor 2:14–7:4 (minus 6:14–7:1) to defend his fitness for ministry. After a disastrous visit to Corinth, he leaves the city humiliated.
3. Arriving in Ephesus, he writes “the letter of tears” (2 Cor 10:1–13:10) in which he defends his ministry and takes on the super apostles.
4. He leaves Ephesus to rendezvous with Titus, whom he meets in Macedonia, and writes his letter of reconciliation (2 Cor 1:1–2:13; 7:5–16; 13:11–13).
5. Paul writes 2 Cor 9 to all the churches of Achaia in order to complete the collection.

While many commentators have espoused partition theories, only a few, such as Rudolf Bultmann, have fully employed them in their commentary. To his credit, Roetzel bases his exegesis on his partition theory. Accordingly, the commentary that follows is not a commentary of 2 Corinthians but a commentary of the five letters of which 2 Corinthians is composed according to Roetzel’s hypothesis: (1) “A Letter of Appeal for the Offering”; (2) “Paul’s First Letter in Defense of His Ministry”; (3) “Paul’s Second Letter in Defense of His Ministry—The Letter of Tears”; (4) “The Reconciling Letter”; and (5) “The Offering Letter to the Churches of Achaia.” The benefit of this approach is that it allows readers to read the letters as Paul wrote them—*if* Roetzel’s hypothesis is correct.

As I stated at the outset of this review, Roetzel and I stand at the opposite ends of the spectrum as regards the question of the letter’s literary integrity, and I must confess I am unrepentant. First, to identify 2 Cor 8 as the first letter and then say that Titus’s mission failed, resulting in a need for Paul to defend his ministry in 2:14–7:4, is innovative, but I do not see the evidence for this hypothesis in the text. Second, if the letter of tears is found in 10:1–13:10, then why is there no reference to the events that occasioned the tearful letter: Paul’s painful visit and the insult heaped upon him by the offending party? Third, if the letter of tears is found in 10:1–13:10, why was it necessary for Paul to write a reconciling letter when, according to 12:14 and 13:1, his third and final visit to Corinth was imminent? Fourth, what is the *Sitz im Leben* that helps us to understand why an editor would have altered these original five letters, excising their greetings, thanksgivings, and closings and introducing foreign material (6:14–7:1) in order to place them in a new configuration? Finally, what would happen if we applied the rule of textual criticism—the more difficult reading is to be preferred—to the question of the letter’s composition? While our historical reconstructions may make more sense to us, is our more logical reading necessarily the original reading?

I suspect the question of the literary integrity of 2 Corinthians is one of those issues that cannot be solved to everyone’s satisfaction, since the evidence can be read in different

ways. That being the case, I am content to respect the opinions of those with whom I disagree, grateful that they investigate questions I do not. Calvin Roetzel has written a helpful volume that complements more traditional commentaries. Used in conjunction with such commentaries, his volume will be of value to those interested 2 Corinthians, a letter he insightfully identifies as “a treasure hidden in a thorny thicket” (19).