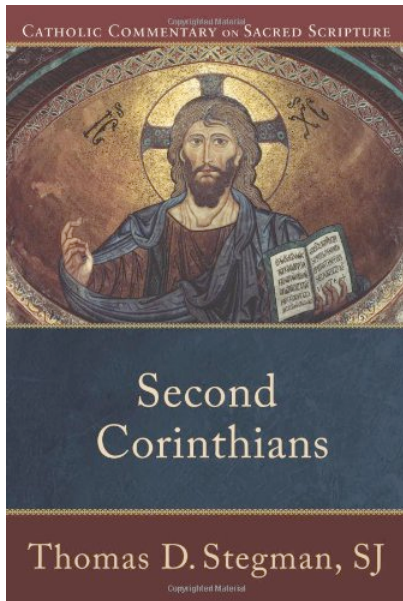


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Stegman, Thomas D.

Second Corinthians

Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture

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Raymond F. Collins
Brown University
Providence, Rhode Island

A good way to describe this new commentary is to say that it is a christological, pastoral, and Catholic reading of Paul's extant second letter to the Corinthians. The introduction to the commentary is relatively short, a mere sixteen pages. These pages treat the usual topics: authorship, literary unity, historical context, theological themes (God, Jesus, the Spirit, church, and salvation) and "relevance for today," a harbinger of what is to come.

Succinctly reviewing the principal arguments for the various partition theories, Stegman takes it as his task to comment upon the letter in its canonical form, for that is the way that it has been read within the church.

That the commentary is a christological reading of the text is not unexpected in the light of the fact that the author's Emory University doctoral dissertation was published a few years ago in the *Analecta biblica* series with the title *The Character of Jesus: The Linchpin to Paul's Argument in 2 Corinthians* (AnBib 158; Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 2005). A key passage in this earlier work, the new commentary, and Stegman's 2007 article, "*Episteusa, dio elalēsa* (2 Cor 4:13): Paul's Christological reading of LXX Ps 155:1a" (CBQ 69 [2007]: 725–45), is 2 Cor 4:13, whose *episteusa* the author takes as a

reference to the fidelity of Jesus. In fact, the theme of Jesus' fidelity echoes almost as a refrain throughout the commentary.

Paul is seen as continuing the story of Jesus. At times, however, it seems to this reviewer that Paul is credited with more knowledge of the story of Jesus than is historically plausible. Believers who accept the gospel as preached by Paul and imitate the apostle as he urges them to do adopt the character of Jesus. Through these believers the character of Jesus can be known.

Accordingly and reading the qualifying "of Christ" as an objective genitive rather than as a subjective genitive, Stegman takes the phrase "letter of Christ" in 2 Cor 3:3 to mean a letter about Christ. Those who "read" the Corinthian community can come to know the character of Jesus. The character of Jesus motif, like that of the fidelity of Jesus, echoes throughout the commentary. Thus the commentary on 2 Cor 13:5–13 is entitled "Take On the Character of Jesus."

That the commentary is a pastoral reading of 2 Corinthians is also not unexpected. Second Corinthians is, after all, the most personal of Paul's extant letters and one in which he deals not only with the consequences of his unexpected and painful visit, the fallout from his tearful letter, opposition from the super-apostles, but also the need to resume the interrupted collection for the church in Jerusalem. Repeatedly and insightfully, Stegman highlights Paul's pastoral strategy in dealing with these various issues. The image of Paul, pastor of a troubled flock, comes through even more clearly than does the image of Paul the apostle or Paul the letter-writer.

That the commentary represents a pastoral reading of Paul's letter is evident in another sense, namely, that its author often addresses words of pastoral insight and pastoral challenge to his readers. To a large extent these appear to have been written to encourage pastors to imitate Paul. At other times they are written to shed light on some of today's perplexing pastoral issues. One particularly intriguing example is Stegman's commentary on 2 Cor 11:30–33, the account of Paul's escape from Damascus. Stegman reads the account as a subversion of the Roman practice of awarding the *corona muralis*. Stegman draws from Paul's account of being let down in a basket from the Damascus wall an exhortation, addressed to pastor and believer alike, to "turn cultural values upside down."

As is generally the case with commentaries, each section of commentary begins with the text of the passage to be commented upon. The text is taken from the New American Bible rather than being an original translation, as is often the case in contemporary commentaries. Those who make use of this commentary will surely find useful the Old and New Testament references noted after each section of text. These footnoted biblical

references are frequently followed by references to *Catechism of the Catholic Church* and the Latin church's lectionary. These added references make of the commentary a useful resource for the Roman Catholic who is preparing a homily or Bible study session.

The third characteristic of this commentary is, as the title of the series to which it belongs suggests, a Catholic commentary. Its Catholic character is initially apparent in its adoption of the New American Bible. The author is not, however, disinclined to disagree with that translation on occasion. In addition, he sometimes makes note of the translations that appear in other versions, notably the RSV, NRSV, NEB, and REB.

The Catholic character of the commentary is most strikingly evident in references to Catholic sacramental practice, church teaching, and examples taken from the lives of the saints embedded within the text of the commentary as well as in "Living Tradition" sidebars that feature such saints as Augustine, John Chrysostom, Ignatius of Loyola—the author is a Jesuit—and the writings of John Paul II. Some non-Roman Catholic readers of the commentary may find these features off-putting, but they enhance its value for a Catholic readership.

The "Reflection and Application" added to each section of the commentary along with the short bibliography and a seven-page glossary of terms make this commentary an eminently useful resource for Bible study groups, especially those that are principally comprised of Roman Catholics who have waited all too long for resources that enable them to study the Bible within the tradition of their own Roman Catholic faith.