
***Romans: A New Translation with
Introduction and Commentary***
by Joseph A. Fitzmyer
(New York: Doubleday, 1993) i-xxxiv,
793 pp., \$40.00

In 1896, in the preface to their seminal commentary on Romans, William Sanday and Arthur Headlam wrote "The commentaries on the Epistle to the Romans which already exist in English . . . are so good and so varied that to add to their number may well seem superfluous." Over 90 years later, A.J.M. Wedderburn entitled a survey of recent commentaries on Romans "Like An Ever-Rolling Stream". The appearance of yet another commentary on this important epistle may be greeted with groans from those trying to keep up with the flood of literature on Paul. yet a commentary in a major international series by a scholar of Fitzmyer's stature warrants notice.

Father Fitzmyer, a Jesuit priest, is professor emeritus of biblical studies at the Catholic University of America. He is past president of both the Society of Biblical Literature and the Catholic Biblical Association in the United States. Readers will be familiar with his work largely due to his two volume commentary on Luke in the Anchor Bible series. Fitzmyer also wrote the articles on Romans for both the original

and revised Jerome Bible Commentary. In addition, he has published a synthesis of Paul's theology *According to Paul: Studies in the Theology of the Apostle* (Paulist, 1993).

The commentary opens with the author's own translation plus a treatment of introductory matters. As in his commentary on Luke, the introduction is extensive (almost 120 pages). The comments on the text begin with a reprint of the author's translation followed by general comments on the passage as a whole and then detailed verse by verse notes. Fitzmyer consistently provides clear, brief explanations of exegetical options (valuable for teachers). transliterated Greek or printed Latin are common, though always followed by an English translation. An extensive list of abbreviations is included as well as indices for subjects and commentators/modern authors.

With regard to larger interpretive issues, Fitzmyer classifies Romans as an "essay-letter" written within specific historical circumstances. However, his comments on the text itself often treat the text as a more abstract theological discussion divorced from those concrete circumstances. The "works" which Paul opposes Fitzmyer's understands in the traditional sense of deeds done to attain righteousness, contrary to interpretations recently advocated by

Sanders and Dunn. I will return to this point below.

Two features of this commentary set it apart from its fellows in the rolling stream. First, the thorough introduction provides an excellent overview of the standard issues - no small feat when one considers the quantity of scholarly literature on every facet of Romans. Fitzmyer also includes a 40 page treatment of Pauline theology arranged according to systematic categories (Theology Proper, Christology, Pneumatology, etc.). While one may question whether categories borrowed from systematics are the most appropriate for understanding Paul's thinking, there is much helpful information here (which can largely be found in his book on Pauline theology).

Secondly, I have never seen a commentary with such extensive bibliographies drawing upon works written in numerous languages. His listing of writings on Paul's teaching, commentaries (arranged according to historical periods), and monographs runs from pages 143-224! Bibliographies also accompany each section of the introduction as well as each pericope. The reader will even find a listing for R.S. Burney's article on the purpose of Romans from the *African Journal of Biblical Studies* vol. 1! The bibliographies will prove invaluable for anyone involved in research, though I

suppose few libraries will have such extensive holdings.

While no one will agree with a commentator's views on every individual passage, two broader faults seriously flaw this work. First, one almost looks in vain for any reference to apocalyptic. The word is not even found in the subject index. Though Fitzmyer admits that Paul divides history into two periods (p.417), he never develops the significance of this obvious fact for his interpretation of Romans or of Paul's theology. For example, Fitzmyer's treatment of 5:12-21 does not even mention apocalyptic. Though the degree and nature to which apocalyptic categories influence Paul's thinking remains debated, an interpretation of Paul in which apocalyptic goes largely unnoticed simply distorts the evidence.

Second, Pauline studies have been dominated by the reexamination of Paul, the Law, and first century Judaism sparked primarily by Ed Sander's 1977 book, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*. While Fitzmyer mentions these developments, one looks in vain for a serious engagement with the issues raised by this debate - issues which affect our understanding of Paul and of Romans at the most fundamental level.

In a 1986 review in *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, Charles Talbert

characterized Fitzmyer's commentary on Luke as belonging to a past era of Lukan scholarship because it relied so heavily on source and redaction criticisms rather than on the newer literary approaches. The same judgment regarding eras can be pronounced over this volume. While this is a superb commentary in many ways, its shallow engagement with crucial issues raised in recent Pauline studies transforms a fine commentary on Romans into a fine commentary for a previous generation.

Yet a fine commentary it remains. For those looking for a traditional "Protestant" sounding commentary on Romans, this will pay handsome dividends. But in a commentary published in the 1990's by a major NT scholar in an important series, one has the right to expect more.

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***TEE Study Materials - Which Way
for a Changing Africa?***

by Grace Holland

(Nairobi: Evangel Publishing House,
1992)

In her opening Acknowledgment, Grace Holland gives credit to the Lord for prompting her in her thirty year endeavor to produce study materials for African Christians. That acknowledgment is a reminder of the central role that she and her husband, Fred, have played in the TEXT-Africa project, which has resulted in Africa's most widely used TEE texts. As Lois McKinney write in the Foreword, "The names of Grace Holland and her husband Fred have become synonymous with African TEE." Anyone working in TEE today will therefore be interested to learn what Grace Holland has to say in this important new book on the topic.

TEE Study Materials - Which Way for a Changing Africa is written in an academic style. It is the project report submitted by Grace Holland to trinity Evangelical Divinity school in USA for her Doctor of Missiology degree in June 1992. Her objective in this study is essential two-fold. First, it is to assess the changes that Grace Holland has seen in Africa and the current needs for training Christian leaders. Second, it is to offer

suggestions on the future production of TEE study materials for Africa. The focus is entirely upon the past experience and future prospects of the TEXT-Africa project.

The first half of the book is a review of the history of the TEXT-Africa series, a report on research completed by Arnold Labrentz in 1982, and a reflection on the changes that Grace Holland has seen in Africa since the initiation of TEE work. Then she describes the findings of her own research based upon the replication of Labrentz's earlier research. Finally, based upon her observations and experience in Africa, and upon the two research projects done in Kenya, she sets out her conclusions and recommendations for the future.

In regard to the current TEE study materials produced through the TEXT-Africa project and referred to as Level 3 texts, Dr. Holland argues for their continued use with some modification. She suggests that some of the repetition be removed and that the materials be made more challenging. At one point her suggestions seem conflicting, when she calls for the shortening of the material in order to reduce cost, and in the very next paragraph suggests more pictures and diagrams. She also identifies changing needs which should be addressed in the current books, and recommends that

several additional books be written to address topics not yet adequately covered.

Dr. Holland concludes by proposing that two new series of TEE texts should be prepared, at the secondary level and the university level. She suggests that the production of these materials should be coordinated on a continent-wide basis. And for such a project she accents the importance of pursuing needs-research, evaluating existing study materials, establishing standards, and organizing the writing, editing, publishing and accreditation of new materials.

Grace Holland's new book is a significant part of the process of self-evaluation that TEE programmes so urgently need to undertake in our day, and furnishes important perspective and challenge to that end.

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