

Käsemann, Ernst. *Commentary on Romans*. Trans. and ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980. xxix + 428 pp. \$22.50.

This commentary on Romans was first published in German, and the present translation is based on the fourth edition published in 1980. Käsemann writes in his Preface "that no literary document has been more important to him than the book of Romans" (p. vii). What we have, then, is a commentary by a leading NT scholar in the area of his particular interest.

In reading this commentary, one observes that the author has probed deeply and profoundly into the thought of the apostle. Although he has studied the vast literature on the subject, he writes not as one who leans on the works of others, but as one who can blaze his own trails because of his intimate knowledge of the subject. On the jacket, various NT scholars of repute describe his work as "magisterial" (Ralph P. Martin), as "seminal" (Karl P. Donfried), and as "the best commentary on Romans available today" (James M. Robinson).

The author's emphasis is on "what Paul meant theologically." He dispenses entirely with introductory matters which even a small commentary would include, and the commentary proper starts immediately with the exegesis. The exegesis is not verse by verse but section by section. After giving a translation of each section, Käsemann provides a bibliography of literature on the particular subject and then proceeds with his exegesis. There are no footnotes, and references are included in parentheses within the text itself. He indicates in his Preface that he follows this style with some misgivings. Surely, this format does not make it easy for the reader to follow through a sentence, especially when the sentence is broken up too often with such bibliographical items.

In dealing with the exegesis of a passage, the author frequently will list different views, followed by an indication of what he feels is the correct interpretation. And throughout the commentary he presents new insights. It should be added that the exegesis by sections rather than by verses does not mean that the author slights any verses. E.g., for Romans 1:1, although the discussion is on Romans 1:1-7, he treats such details as the question of the prescript of a letter, the name "Paul," the meaning of the words "servant of Christ Jesus," the textual problems (whether "Christ" should be read before "Jesus"), and the meaning of the words "apostle," "call," and "gospel."

It might be useful to examine how Käsemann treats certain particular passages. In regard to the "righteousness of God" in Romans 1:17, he opposes the dominant view which interprets this text as the eschatological action of salvation. He objects to this explanation because he sees the

righteousness of God not only as power but also as a gift. Paul designates the gospel as a gift to Christians and simultaneously as the power of God. For Paul, Christ is God's eschatological gift to us and in this gift is revealed God's claim on us and also our salvation. In regard to the "wrath of God" in 1:18 he rejects the idea of holy indignation and also the view that this is an impersonal causal connection. He sees God himself at work in a hidden way in the causal connection. In 3:25-26, he sees Paul using fixed tradition and understands *parensis* simply as remission of penalty, not as overlooking or letting pass. Thus, the passage does not deal with retributive righteousness but with the patience of God, demonstrating God's covenant faithfulness and effecting forgiveness.

Respecting the Adam-Christ typology on 5:12, Käsemann finds no adequate explanation in the efforts put forth by the history-of-religion proponents. The Semitic idea of corporate personality he finds as an aid to the understanding of the passage, but he feels that the point of the text is missed when emphasis is placed upon the idea that the ancestor potentially decides the fate of his descendants. The issue, he feels, is the uniqueness of Adam and Christ in characterizing history at its beginning and its end—at primal time and end time, which are in antithesis. The words *eph' hō* he translates as "because," but sees here "an ambivalence between destiny and individual guilt" (p. 148). For him, the sinful act of the individual is his own and is a manifestation of the general fall into guilt, and thus leads to death. The emphasis of Paul throughout this section, however, is to show the superiority of Christ, who came to undo the work of Adam. Karl Barth's interpretation of this passage is considered by Käsemann as almost grotesque, since the point of this passage is not to show that Christ is original man and that fallen Adam is derived man.

In his discussion of 6:12-23, Käsemann modifies the neat distinction between justification and sanctification that is traditionally taught. He is concerned that this section be not reduced to mere ethics and a combination with mysticism. In his words, "the apostle's concern is not with sinlessness as freedom from guilt, but with freedom from the power of sin"; it is not with development to perfection, but with a constantly new grasping of the once-for-all "eschatological, saving act of justification" (p. 174).

On Rom 7, Käsemann follows the generally accepted view that Paul is describing a pre-Christian experience from a Christian point of view. Vss. 9-11 refer to Adam, but every person repeats Adam's experience in his own life. Vss. 14-25 portray the results of the previous verses "in their cosmic breadth" (p. 199). In 8:26, Käsemann sees the apostle dealing, not with the question of prayer, but with glossolalia. In 10:4 the idea of "goal" or "meaning and fulfillment" is rejected. For Käsemann, the law comes to an end with Christ.

In chaps. 9-11, Käsemann sees Paul trying to fulfill the apocalyptic dream of bringing about the conversion of Israel through his mission to

the Gentiles. Paul sees himself as the precursor of the *parousia*, since the conversion of Israel is the last act of salvation history. Instead of the Gentiles coming in at the end, according to the hope of Judaism, Paul has the picture reversed.

In chap. 14, the weak brother is a Jewish Christian who has been exposed to heretical ideas, such as described in Galatians and Colossians. Käsemann sees chap. 16 as an independent letter which was later added to the epistle.

The above survey of the views on selected passages does not do justice to the thorough discussion that Käsemann actually gives to each of these passages. It becomes apparent, as well, that one cannot always agree with his conclusions. Nevertheless, from this rich and provocative commentary much can be learned. The prospective reader needs to be warned, however, that the book is not easy to read, for Käsemann does not write with the clarity of a William Barclay. In his Preface he indicates that he was challenged by Lietzmann's commentary to be brief, yet scholarly. The lack of clarity may be due to space limitations, but it may also derive from the fact that Käsemann assumes so much knowledge on the part of his reader, especially with regard to the vast amount of literature alluded to throughout his commentary. Many times one will wonder exactly what Käsemann means, especially when he rejects two different positions and then offers his own which seems to be similar to one of those which he has rejected.

A bibliography of commentaries on Romans, other works which are frequently cited, and further pertinent literature, is included. There is no index.

This commentary will undoubtedly not be popular reading, but it will be a basic work to which reference will frequently be made.

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Knowles, David. *The Religious Orders in England*. 3 vols. New York and London: Cambridge University Press, 1979. Paperback, \$42.95.

Cambridge University Press has performed a genuine service to the academic community by reprinting David Knowles's classic study of the religious orders in England. These volumes, originally published in 1948, 1955, and 1959 respectively, were immediately hailed as authoritative and that judgment has stood the test of time. Knowles's learning is immense, his scholarship meticulous, and his approach compassionate. His work will long remain the standard one, against which other studies will be judged.