

**The 381st Meeting of
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McCormick Theological Seminary**

Abstracts

Hans Dieter Betz, University of Chicago

“The Reasons for Romans: Why Did Paul Write His Letter to the Romans?”

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Surprisingly, the Apostle Paul’s Letter to the Romans has a special place in the New Testament for at least two reasons: It has generated more commentaries, and it still contains more unexplored problems than all other New Testament titles. My own current research is concerned with the latter reason, the unexplored, and often undiscovered, problems of this most famous Christian document. From my research I will report about four major issues concerning *Romans*: (1) The literary shape of what we call *Romans* is surprisingly different from what we are to assume from the modern translations. (2) When writing his *Romans* in Corinth Paul knew more about the conditions of Christians in Rome than we normally assume. (3) When Paul finally arrived in Rome the challenges awaiting him were different from what he predicted in his letter. (4) The reasons for his final prevailing over his adversaries were assured by a change of his rhetorical methods.

Julien C. H. Smith, Valparaiso University

“Hope and Endurance in Romans: Agrarian Virtues for Citizenship in the Heavenly Commonwealth”

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This paper proposes a reading of Romans, focusing on 8:18-25, in conversation with both ancient political philosophy and contemporary agrarian discourse. The investigation is guided by the following question: What virtues are required and enabled by citizenship within a heavenly commonwealth (Phil 3:20) whose *telos* is the eschatological transformation of creation (Rom 8:19-25)? The first part of the paper locates Paul’s argument within a wide stream of ancient political philosophy that correlated the formation of virtue with the reign of the good king. As attested by Augustan court poets such as Virgil (*Fourth Eclogue*), the reign of the virtuous king was believed to usher in a golden age marked by virtue and agricultural fecundity. Yet by claiming the return of Saturn’s reign as a *fait accompli*, such propaganda implied no causal relationship between human virtue and just, healthy agricultural practices. Indeed, Roman practices such as the distribution of grain (*Annona*) in the face of declining Italian agriculture divorced the fruits of farming from the agrarian virtues that sustain land health. Ironically, the economic practices used to prop up the fiction of Rome’s golden age not only failed to inculcate and sustain agrarian virtues, but instead contributed to widespread ecological degradation. Paul’s argument in Romans, beginning with the announcement of the reign of Israel’s Messiah Jesus (Rom 1:3-4, 16) and proceeding towards a description of the virtues of the church, the body of the Messiah (Rom 12), echoes key elements of the audience’s cultural repertoire concerning the inculcation of virtue and the reign of the good king. Yet crucially, Paul looks not backwards with nostalgia, but forwards with hopeful endurance. The virtues of hope and endurance, largely absent from the classical canon, are essential to Paul’s vision of the Messiah’s reign and its *telos*, the liberation of creation through the revealing of the Messiah’s people in glory (Rom 5:2-5; 8:24-25; 12:12; 15:4-5).

Ken Stone, Chicago Theological Seminary

“‘All These Look to You’: Reading Animality in Psalm 104 in the Anthropocene”

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Psalm 104 is associated with biblical creation theology, but it seldom receives as much attention as Genesis. Yet Genesis has been and continues to be used to justify human dominion over other animals, contributing to the scientific identification of a new era in the earth’s history known as the “Anthropocene.” In contrast, Psalm 104 provides an ecological representation of creation that recognizes God’s care for, and relationship with, animals. Humans appear in the psalm, but only as one creature among others. A focus on Psalm 104 may foster an approach to biblical creation theology that is more attentive to animals and animality, and useful as an ecological frame for reading Genesis and other texts.