Book Review: I & II Timothy and Titus

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although not exhaustive, information concerning Paul’s travels. 1 Thess 2:14–16 is not an interpolation.

Green exhibits conservative, evangelical theological commitments. In 1–2 Thessalonians Green sees a high Christology, including interpreting theos of 2 Thess 1:12 as referring to Christ. 1 Thess 5:10 (“he died for us”) refers to Christ’s substitutionary death. A Christian’s entire salvation, including his good works, is within a grace system (pp. 237–38). The wording of “fallen asleep” (1 Thess 4:4, 5:10) is improperly used to advance soul sleep. 2 Thess 1:9 teaches the eternal destruction of the wicked, not annihilation.

Other interpretations of interest include: Green disagrees with the traditional view that 1 Thess 2:1–12 is a real defense against real opponents. Instead, Paul is writing in anticipation of problems. Green interprets 1 Thess 4:15–17 as Christ meeting the Church in the air and then all returning to earth (contra traditional rapture view). Concerning 2 Thess 2:1–12, the imperial cult is the background allusion for the future event. The “temple of god” alludes to the imperial cult. The restraining activity is done by demonic forces.

In the main, I am not convinced by the patron-client methodology. Consider 2 Thess 3:6–13. According to Green, Paul is correcting the non-working clients who are being supported by the patrons. This seems to disregard that (1) not all clients even within the patron-client view did no work for their patrons; (2) in 2 Thess 3:8–9 (and elsewhere) Paul clearly uses labor practices, not patron-client relationships, as the logic from which he argues; and (3) if Green’s interpretation is correct, Paul should have also chastised the patrons who were equally contributing to the problem. Although not convinced, I did appreciate Green’s consistent application of his patron-client methodology to a variety of verses. It allowed me to understand better the advantages and disadvantages of this methodology and gave me an opportunity to evaluate it fairly. Also, even for passages that Green concluded were illuminated by the patron-client methodology, he did not allow this to overturn the surface understanding of the text. Hence, many times our differences were only at the margins.

As is well known, 1–2 Thessalonians do not have any explicit OT quotes, but they do include many OT allusions and echoes. Green well notes these allusions and echoes; however, I wish he spent more time exploring their possible impact on Paul’s text.

Despite my disagreement with the patron-client methodology, I still consider this commentary a very good guide to interpreting the vast majority of 1–2 Thessalonians. I already have and will continue to recommend it to my pastoral students.

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Raymond Collins’s commentary on the Pastoral Epistles (hereafter, PE) is the lead volume in the New Testament Library series. Since it is the lead volume in the series and many readers may not be familiar with it, it may be worthwhile to give a brief introduction. According to the editors (C. Black and B. Gaventa from Princeton with J. Carroll from Union Theological Seminary) this series attempts to offer “authoritative commentary” on “every book and major aspect of the New Testament.” Thus, it is intended that the series will eventually encompass both commentaries on NT books as well as monographs dealing with topics related to NT study. Some examples of the latter are


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a forthcoming treatment of Pauline theology by V. P. Furnish and a forthcoming volume on the use of the OT in the New by J. R. Wagner. With regard to the commentaries on the NT letters, as in the case of the particular volume under review, "authoritative commentary" translates into an attempt to provide fresh translations, critical reconstructions of the historical background, consideration of matters of literary design, and "theologically perceptive exposition," all gathered together with a diverse audience in mind ("a commentary for the student and the professional scholar, for the pastor and the serious lay reader").

The intended audience of the series provides a convenient jumping off point for an evaluation of the particular volume under review. The impossibly wide target audience sets Collins's work up for disappointment. His easy-to-read style, careful explanation of the text, wide grasp of primary sources, and affable tone certainly invite readers. But what type of readers would be satisfied with the fare on offer is another question. This is not to impugn Collins's work in and of itself, only to point out that it is impossible to satisfy such a wide gambit of readership. For students being encouraged to enter into the scholarly debate over a disputed text, both to become informed and to observe a model of proper engagement, for a professional scholar looking for straightforward, explicit, and careful engagement with scholarship on key passages (as opposed to sleuthing one's way through a passage in order to detect who has influenced/stands behind the author's views), or for a pastor wanting to look further into a particular issue raised in the commentary—these will very likely not be satisfied with the design plan of this series. While including an exhaustive index of primary sources, a limited subject index, as well as a representative bibliography, the volume contains no author index, undoubtedly due to the fact that so few authors are explicitly mentioned in the commentary (a few authors are parenthetically referenced in the text while some appear in the infrequent footnotes—averaging less than one per page). The approach also offers little by way of argumentation. Collins walks the reader carefully through the book explaining passages with hardly a mention of the issues swirling around his explanations or without argumentation showing how he arrived at his interpretations over against competing options. This assessment is not so much to fault Collins as it is to suggest that the target audience of the series is narrower and that the text takes a particular tack toward addressing that narrower slice, so that the commentary may not be wholly satisfactory for classroom or study use, especially for those not necessarily in agreement with Collins's explanations. Or, at the least, Collins's volume would be a complement to an already robust library of resources on the Pastorals, but not a likely purchase for the single or primary resource for study in these letters.

The contents of the commentary are divided into an introduction to the corpus, an introduction to each book, section introductions, verse-by-verse commentary, and nine excurses on various topics (e.g. "Excursus 6: Debate on Marriage and Food"). The interpretation of the letters is set within the framework of double-pseudepigraphy—both author, "Paul," and recipients, "Timothy" and "Titus," are literary creations put forward by an unknown author, "the pastor," somewhere around 80 CE. (That the author is someone other than Paul "is beyond reasonable doubt" [p. 7]. The reader is further assured that pseudepigraphy was an accepted mode of writing by the early Church and carries no opprobrium.) The "pastor" is attempting to bring Pauline tradition into meaningful contact with the Hellenistic world of the late first century to help the Church find its niche in the Greco-Roman world now that the parousia is no longer imminent. Although he may be over-accommodating at times with regard to the development of his ethic (e.g. he fails to assert the "radical equality of men and women in Christ" that Collins sees in the real Paul [p. 73]), the "pastor" does not engage completely uncritically with his culture and attempts to provide a faith-based anchor to his paraenesis. The opponents he battles are another pseudepigraphical device since he addresses no
identifiable group. He simply wants to “put the community on guard against various kinds of error, no matter the source” (p. 12). On the literary level, there is a similarity of 1 Timothy and Titus to early documents on church order (e.g. Didache) and of 2 Timothy to testamentary texts (e.g. Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs). These literary categories help to explain the disparate nature of their material as well as contribute to Collins’s case for their inauthenticity (since neither genre is associated with truly original compositions).

All in all Collins’s work is to be commended for its serious treatment of the author as a theologian in his own right. In this way he reflects the growing trend in scholarship, whether among those who view them as authentic or those who view them as inauthentic, that recognizes that the author of the PE is no second-rate theologian who clumsily juxtaposes theological shards into a less than coherent mosaic. This work also deserves recognition for the enlightening and helpful collection of Greco-Roman sources that, although one might disagree with Collins as to how they relate to the substance and ethos of the “pastor’s” own theology and ethics (especially if his pseudepigraphical framework is found unconvincing), certainly must be considered. These admirable points make me happy to have the book on my shelf. However, as one unconvinced by the pseudepigraphical framework of this commentary and as one unconvinced of the historical validity of describing pseudepigraphy as an accepted form of canonical writing (such that pseudepigraphy historically equals forgery/deception), this work seems to add less to our understanding of the PE than it takes away, given its interpretive framework and its method of presenting this framework (see comments above).

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In this commentary Kraftchick approaches the epistles of Jude and 2 Peter from a critical perspective. In his introduction to Jude, Kraftchick argues, “it is unlikely that Jude, the brother of James and Jesus, authored the book” (p. 21). The only ground he gives is that the Greek of the epistle is better than one would expect from a Palestinian Jew. He argues that 2 Peter was not written by the apostle Peter and that the unknown author used the apostle’s name to lend “authority to his arguments” (p. 86). Based on 2 Pet 1:14, he identifies the epistle as a “farewell testament” and explains that “by choosing the ‘farewell’ genre and by providing ‘proofs’ that follow in vv. 16–20, the author establishes his trustworthiness as a guide and interpreter of the fundamentals of the faith” (pp. 101–2). Since Kraftchick sets the composition of the epistle “somewhere between 90 and 100 CE” (p. 72), it is difficult to understand why he contends that the alleged author would have used a pseudonym to establish his authority and would have chosen the “farewell” genre to establish his trustworthiness. The original readers would certainly have known that Peter was already dead.

Kraftchick demonstrates some weakness in his understanding of the Greek language. For example, in his comments on 2 Pet 1:12, he mentions “the present indicative of the infinitive ‘to remind’” (p. 102). Since infinitives do not express mood, it is incorrect to label the infinitive as indicative. He identifies the phrases “of the Lord” and “of the apostles” connected to the word “commandment” in 2 Pet 3:2 as “double possessives” (p. 149). These are properly understood as genitives of source. Kraftchick’s explanation...