



Christopher R. Hutson. *First and Second Timothy and Titus*. Paideia. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2019, xxii + 308 pp., \$30.00.

Christopher Hutson is the Associate Dean of the College of Biblical Studies at Abilene Christian University, and his commentary follows a Yale dissertation and a half dozen published essays on the Pastoral Epistles (PE). Having written commentaries on all three of the PE myself, I naturally read Christopher Hutson’s work with great interest. But before I offer my assessment, some orienting comments. The format of the commentary is standard: a general introduction to the PE followed by an analysis of each book in the expected canonical order of 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, and Titus. The “Foreword” by the editors sets expectations for the reader by establishing the main “didactic aim” of the Paideia series (“to enable students to understand each book of the New Testament as a literary whole”), identifying the primary audience (“students—including MA students in religious and theological studies programs”), and defining the “reader-centered literary” approach, which breaks down the letters into larger rhetorical units and then explores these by tracing their rhetorical flow and then reflecting on key theological issues (x–xi). In the “Preface,” Hutson shares a bit about his religious upbringing and the reasons for his particular interest in the PE. Key influences include his interaction not just with prominent scholars—notably Abraham J. Malherbe and Wayne Meeks—but also “faithful people in a lot of churches” (xii). In the section “General Introduction” to the Pastoral Epistles, Hutson states the main purpose of his commentary: “This is a book about ministerial formation. Specifically, it is a commentary on a collection of letters for young ministers about how to be effective ministers of Christ Jesus” (1). Any assessment we make of Hutson’s work should factor in the aim and design of this series and the author’s stated purpose.

A perusal of the “General Introduction” alone makes clear that Hutson is well acquainted with the scholarly literature and has wrestled with the original text, its theology, and its implications. We should applaud him for the way he has condensed a massive amount of information with such finesse and lucidity (and humor!). Moreover, with key issues, Hutson does not shy from indicating where he falls. For example: “I find the arguments in favor of separate authorship strained and am convinced that the same author produced all three letters” (2). Finally, Hutson models how to adopt a position without overstating its importance. For example: “Most commentators take a firm position on authorship and leave the impression that one cannot understand the PE correctly without first adopting that position. . . . But I would rather you follow me through the argument of these letters than agree with me about who wrote them” (2). I do not agree with some of Hutson’s fundamental points. For instance, he rejects the idea that the author of these letters had “in mind some secondary audience beyond the named addressees” (3). As I underscore in my commentaries, I believe that this seemingly pedantic point bears significant relevance for how we “hear” and ultimately interpret all three letters. Nevertheless, on the whole Hutson represents different points and his own perspective with clarity, nuance, and grace. For all these reasons, PE newbies and veterans alike will find in this commentary both a

repository of resources for further exploration and a model for how to judiciously sift through all the scholarship towards reasonable and charitable conclusions.

At the end of the “General Introduction,” Hutson speaks about his purpose at greater length: “My task is to guide readers through a scholarly forest. A commentary of this size tends to stick to the main path When I think one pathway is superior, I argue for it. But often I point out more than one legitimate option and leave readers to choose. When I do not force a decision, readers may judge whether the text is genuinely ambiguous or my thinking is cloudy” (21). This is a noble but extremely difficult task, and herein lies one possible weakness in the commentary. On the one hand, the commentary purposefully does not delve into the text. As stated in the “Foreword,” the focus is on the rhetorical flow of the various textual units. On the other hand, the primary audience—who are presumably somewhat new to the PE—are expected to choose between different and oftentimes complicated options. The net effect on a young student could be an awareness of different options but an inability to decide what the text probably means—which is the main point of interpretation. This problem is compounded because Hutson does not explain his translations. For example, with 2 Tim 4:17, he writes: “But the Lord was with me and empowered me, so that through me **the proclamation was multiplied**” (205). (The more common translation “fulfilled” is important because it reflects the main purpose of 2 Timothy, namely to inspire Timothy to fulfill his calling as an evangelist.) Using Hutson’s own metaphor of a path in a scholarly forest, the commentary can sometimes feel like a path that regularly splinters on both sides into many “legitimate” options, so much so that the reader can lose sight of what the main path was. Perhaps what might have served the reader better would have been to highlight Hutson’s own interpretation of the various units and then to offer options almost in passing. But this may reflect my own pedagogical bias.

One additional comment (echoing my previous remark somewhat): the commentary is not as successful as Frank Matera’s *Romans Paideia* commentary in “Tracing the Train of Thought.” For example, in his treatment of the rhetorical flow of 1 Tim 1:3–20, Hutson rightly labels the section as a “charge.” But his outline of the section (31)—“Circumstances of the charge (1:3–7), Digression on the nature of Torah (1:8–11), Thanksgiving prayer (1:12–17), The charge proper (1:18–20)” —fails to do justice to the way the author of 1 Timothy purposefully organized the section—without digressions—around the theme of “charge”; see my comments in *A Charge to God’s Missional Household* (pp. 66–141). Similarly, while I appreciate the decision to focus on rhetorical units versus deep textual analysis, a little bit more attention to the text would have served the purpose of helping the student recognize the overall rhetorical designs of the letters. Doing so for Titus, for instance, would have yielded a far different outline for Titus that is based on the text itself *and* underscores (correctly) the main theme of exhorting believers toward philanthropy. While Hutson’s outline of Titus reflects the letter’s “directive” quality (212), a cursory glance of it suggest that the letter is a random amalgam of community directives.

Aside from these observations, I commend the commentary. Hutson models clear writing, offers plenty of wise pastoral reflections in the “Theological Issues” section, and draws from the rich insights of many different traditions and perspectives. New students can use it as a launchpad for

further studies. Veterans can identify their own gaps in the scholarly literature. The decades of deep reflection Hutson has devoted to these important letters can provide benefit to all, especially aspiring pastors that are looking for a reliable guide to help discover the wisdom contained in the PE.

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