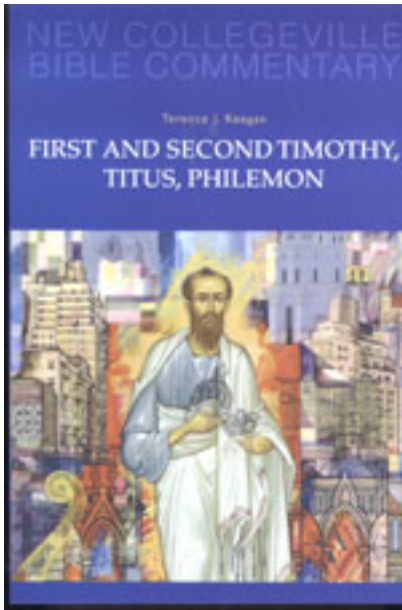


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Keegan, Terrence J.

First and Second Timothy, Titus, Philemon

New Collegeville Bible Commentary 9

Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2005. Pp. 80. Paper.
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This attractively produced paperback is volume 9 in the New Collegeville Bible Commentary, a Roman Catholic publication that aims to provide “scholarly based commentary that is written at a pastoral level” and is presumably meant for lay people. The commentary is based on the text of the New American Bible, which is included above the running commentary printed beneath it. There are brief introductions to each of the four books discussed, together with three pages of “review aids and discussion topics” that aim to apply the text to the lives of Christian believers today, and there are also cross-references to citations of the text in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. The actual amount of space devoted to explanation of the text is thus quite limited.

It follows that the commentary provided is very basic. Although it reflects a knowledge of contemporary scholarship, there is no space for discussion of critical and controversial issues; no other works on the letters are cited, and no suggestions offered as to where a reader might turn for a fuller treatment. The author is concerned to present the letters as “part of the inspired scriptural conversation between God and God’s people” (a phrase that echoes a description of the Pastoral Epistles by C. K. Barrett), so the commentary is essentially theological rather than historical. When dealing with the text in such a limited space, the temptation can be simply to paraphrase the text without much by way of

explanation. The author has managed on the whole to avoid this danger and to concentrate rather on drawing attention to the significant theological themes. He also brings out the basic structure of the letters, such as the way in which the first and last chapters of 1 Timothy bracket the letter. He affirms a “hermeneutic of suspicion” for reading 1 Tim 2, “a method that questions the validity of [the] cultural presuppositions and seeks a deeper meaning in the text” but also questions our own cultural presuppositions. The passage then teaches little more than that “good order based on sound doctrine needs to be maintained in the church.” The undeveloped nature of the ecclesiastical teaching regarding offices and functions in the congregation is recognized. The differences between 2 Timothy and its companions are noted, especially the stress here on preparation for a situation in which Paul himself is no longer there to act as a leader. The lack of space results in the absence of any consideration of the interpretation of Titus 2:13. Philemon is said to be the shortest letter in the New Testament, apparently through overlooking 2 and 3 John, and is assigned to an earlier imprisonment of Paul than his final one in Rome. Although the letter does not reconsider the practice of slavery, it signals a real change in social relationships between the Christian owner and slave.

Clearly this volume (and presumably the series of which it is part) has a limited and useful function in providing basic notes for Bible study groups and is to be welcomed as such, but its length and character prevent it from doing any more than that.