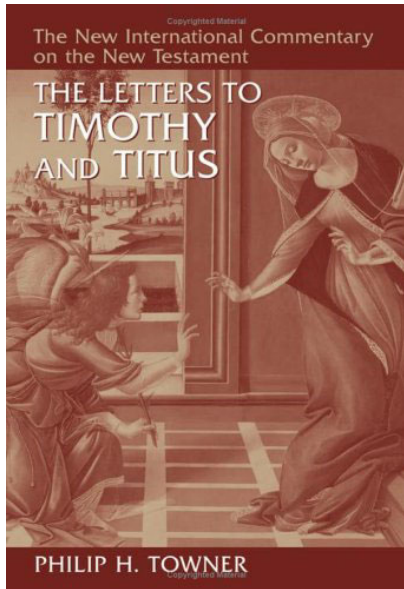


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**Towner, Phillip**

***The Letters to Timothy and Titus***

New International Commentary on the New Testament

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Towner's commentary on the Pastoral Epistles, a title that he eschews, is certainly one of the largest, if not the largest, commentary to appear in English on these letters in recent years. Towner was well suited for the task. A revised version of his doctoral thesis, *The Goal of Our Instruction*, appeared under the Sheffield imprint almost twenty years ago. Since then he has not only published a number of articles on the Pastoral Epistles, but he has also worked with I. Howard Marshall in the preparation of the latter's ICC volume on the Pastorals.

Towner's disavowal of the "Pastoral Epistles" nomenclature forms a ring construction around his 89-page introduction (2, 88–89). At bottom he is less concerned with Pastoral Epistles language than he is with the idea that the use of such language promotes the idea that the three letters should be read as a single corpus. Towner prefers that they be read as individual compositions, with each individual letter serving as the primary context for the interpretation of any of its parts. At best, following an opinion promoted by Luke Timothy Johnson, Towner would allow that the three letters be identified as a cluster, similar to the Romans-Galatians, 1–2 Corinthians, and Ephesians-Colossians clusters of the Pauline epistles. From Johnson Towner has also taken the idea that the *mandata*

*principis* provide an adequate paradigm for understanding the alternation of second-person and third-person passages within the letters.

Likewise contributing to Towner's dislike of the corpus notion as a useful tool in understanding these letters is his conviction that the letters are best read as genuine Pauline compositions. Towner considers the hypothesis of their pseudepigraphic nature as an assumption and takes issue with some, although not all, of the arguments advanced in favor of their late and pseudepigraphic nature. On the whole his arguments are consistent with those of Johnson, to whom he liberally refers, but Towner's rebuttal of the contemporary consensus with respect to authorship seems to this author to be rather weak. Towner's preference for Pauline authorship seems to be as much an assumption as the position with which he takes odds.

In addition to opting for the individuality and Pauline origin of each of the letters, Towner's exegesis supposes two other methodological principles: Paul's engagement with biblical (Old Testament) texts; and the importance of the location of the named addressees. Each of these principles is important, but they seem not to have consistent application throughout the millenary pages of the commentary. Towner makes good use of material pertaining to Crete and offers a valuable compendium of the ancient sources containing documentation pertinent to Crete (659–62). However, he uses material pertaining to Ephesus less often and less successfully. As far as the biblical material is concerned, many of the cited references are valuable, providing some good insights, but some of the referenced material seems to this reader to have been stretched a bit too far.

Three additional features of this commentary should likewise be noted in advance. First, rather than giving Towner's own translation of the Greek text, the commentary offers the English text of the TNIV. Towner sometimes distances himself from the interpretation of that version, but for the most part he lets it stand. Second, the commentary is heavily footnoted. Most of these notes are lexical in nature or provide secondary references. Third, the commentary contains six relatively short excursus ("Conscience in the Letters to Timothy and Titus"; "The 'Trustworthy Saying' Formula"; "Godliness and Respectability"; "Self-Control"; "Good Deeds"; and "The Epiphany Concept"), all of which are embedded in the commentary on 1 Timothy. For the most part the material contained in the excursus is lexical. They contain occasional useful reference to contemporary Hellenistic literature and sometimes compare the differences of usage among the three letters.

A work as massive as this one contains a valuable amount of interesting and useful commentary, but it suffers from occasional repetition prompting an "I have read that before" reaction from the reader. On the other hand, the commentary profits from the author's analysis of similarities between these three letters and the Pauline *homologoumena*.

It is obviously impossible to comment on Towner's analysis of each of the individual passages in this voluminous work. One particular feature, however, stands out. That is the influence of Bruce Winter's reconstruction of the "new Roman woman," a sort of sexual revolution before the sexual revolution of the 1960s, on Towner's interpretation of the passages dealing with women, notably, 1 Tim 2:9-16, a passage that Towner urges should be read in close connection with 2:8. Towner cites the new woman paradigm as well as realized eschatology and the teaching of the heretics as coalescing to produce the image of the woman susceptible to error/heresy that occasionally appears in these letters.

With regard to leadership positions within the church, Towner opines that the women of 1 Tim 3:11 are female deacons, albeit with lesser responsibilities than those of male deacons. His position on the individuality of each of the letters allows him to opine that the "overseers" and "elders" are separate entities in 1 Timothy, whereas both terms come together to describe one individual in Titus 1:5-7.

On reading the author's commentary on its various pericopes, I found myself sometimes saying "I agree," "I wish that I had said that," "I disagree," or "That's a stretch." That is probably a good thing, since it reminds me that this commentary contains a wealth of material and that its author is a good partner for dialogue about the significance of the letters to Timothy and Titus.