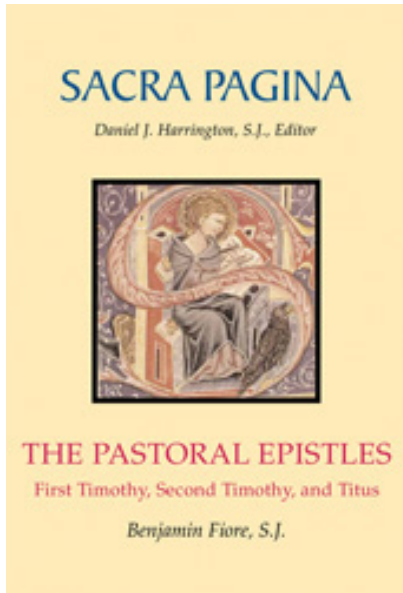


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**Fiore, Benjamin**

***The Pastoral Epistles: First Timothy, Second Timothy, and Titus***

Sacra Pagina

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Benjamin Fiore, a priest in the Society of Jesus, who also has teaching responsibilities at Canisius College in Buffalo and Campion College in Regina, has offered a valuable midsize commentary on the Pastoral Epistles in the Sacra Pagina series. The series seeks to “provide sound critical analysis without any loss of sensitivity to religious meaning” (xi). Each section includes an introduction followed by an outline before arriving at the exegesis proper. Once there, the author provides his or her translation, verse-by-verse notes, finally culminating in an interpretation of the verses in question. This section ties together the exegesis provided in the notes, with valuable quotations from the early church fathers as well as contemporary reflections on how the text in question may be applied to the life of the church. Finally, each section concludes with a bibliography pointing the reader to works for further study.

Fiore’s classical training under the supervision of Abraham Malherbe of Yale is put to valuable use throughout the commentary. By personal count, Fiore references over eighty Greco-Roman authors representing over 160 works. What is more remarkable is the fact that Fiore manages to use these references judiciously, rather than devolving into parallelomania. Turning to the commentary proper, Fiore provides a brief introduction to the whole of the Pastoral Epistles (5–24), outlining first his methodology and interpretive approach (5–7), followed by a discussion on the literary character of the letters (8–14).

After addressing historical background issues (14–20), Fiore concludes with what he deems the letters’ “hortatory strategy and content” (matters of exemplary figures, Christology, and soteriology; 21–23).

These introductory matters help set the tone for the remainder of the commentary and thus merit some discussion here. The Pastoral Epistles, as opposed to the remainder of the Pauline corpus, are concerned with “quibbling over the interpretation of the Law, an exaggerated asceticism, and esoteric speculation” (5). Moreover, the Pastoral Epistles promote good works while waiting for the *parousia* (although not with the same anticipation evidenced in Paul’s other letters), while the main foci are doctrinal stability and the social standing of these communities. Concerning authorship, Fiore suggests that the Pastoral Epistles are pseudonymous due to the appearance of creedal summaries, appeals to “other materials,” and “allusions to community officers and ecclesial procedures.” The awareness of the delayed *parousia* and the identification of heretical teachers with false teachers at the end times (5–6) round out the defense of this verdict. As an aside, it would have been nice to see Fiore interact with Philip Towner’s massive NICNT commentary as well as Witherington’s *Letters and Homilies for Hellenized Christians*, as they both predate Fiore’s by a year. Towner defends an “allonymous” view (25–26), while Witherington suggests that Paul had help from Luke in his composition of the Pastoral Epistles (67–68). Interaction with these views would have been welcome, due to the recent evaluations that question pseudonymity as a helpful category in characterizing the Pastoral Epistles. Fiore does conclude that, “Although their author might not have been Paul, the Pastoral Epistles decidedly place themselves within the Pauline tradition, albeit with alterations that make accommodations to the situation of a more developed church structure and a more complex relationship with the larger society” (16).

Fiore views the Pastoral Epistles as hortatory documents. This leads to their readied use by “patristic-era moral interpretations” (7). Fiore’s abundant use of this material also is a strength of this commentary. Next Fiore discusses the difference between the testamentary 2 Timothy and the church-order documents that are 1 Timothy and Titus. Regarding 2 Timothy, Fiore notes that it marks Paul’s “last will and testament” addressed to Timothy, his designated head of the Ephesian church (8). One can see the similarity to Acts 20:17–38, Paul’s farewell discourse to the Ephesian elders. Fiore concludes that the similarity is that Paul’s last will and testament addresses “the community situation of conflict between orthodoxy and heresy. The letter aims to embolden the audience to cling fast to the Pauline tradition in thought and action against those Paul ‘predicted’ would deviate from it” (9). The church-order epistles 1 Timothy and Titus “resemble official memoranda given in classical antiquity to subordinate officials on their assumption of a new position” (e.g., Tebtunis Papyri 703; 9). More generally, Fiore sums up the common

concern that links the individual letters of the Pastoral Epistles together by noting that they exhort readers to the “traditional true faith,” as the audience is expected to act accordingly, while opposing deviations from this truth, highlighting the “moral decline” that punctuates this deviation. This explains the use of the “full range of hortatory devices as taught in the rhetorical schools and put to use in the literary exhortation letters by other real or pseudonymous authors of their day” (13). As for these opponents, they display certain affinities with the Pharisaic tradition, but at the end of the day, “the identity of the opponents remains an open question” (15). Fiore suggests dating the Pastoral Epistles to circa 80–90 C.E., due to the lack of development in the ecclesiastic structures evinced at the time of Ignatius.

Turning to each of the letters themselves, I will sketch briefly some of the highlights of Fiore’s analysis. In 1 Timothy, specifically 1:3–11 and 18–20, where an outline of the false teachers is provided in the form of a “vice list,” Fiore rightly cautions the interpreter to not read these lists as historical descriptions of the false teachers; “it is a rhetorical characterization to denigrate the opponents” (46). In 1 Tim 2:5, Paul’s indication that there is “one God...” is noted in the exegetical notes as “the fundamental theological insight carried over from Judaism” (60 n. 5), while referencing Mal 2:10. One wonders here why Fiore omits Deut 6:4. Also, in 1 Timothy 2 (2:12), Fiore concludes, rightly, that the social strategy of the Pastoral Epistles looks to restore the balance of the church in the eyes of the larger community, thus making it more palatable to Greco-Roman society and more in line with Pauline tradition (67). Moving ahead to 2 Timothy, as noted before, “the letter has the tone of a final testament” (133 n. 1). The letter centers on two main themes—Paul’s faithfulness and Timothy’s carrying on of that tradition—as seen in the thanksgiving section (1:3–5) followed by the exhortation (1:6–4:18). A curious conclusion of Fiore’s comes into play regarding the interpretation of the “final days” discussed in 2 Tim 3:1. Fiore notes: “The letter’s equation of the contemporary false teaching and evil deeds with the end-time tells against its being authentically Paul’s. Paul consistently looked forward to the final days” (165 n. 1; see 1 Cor 7:29–31; Rom 13:11–14; 1 Thess 4:15–18). This discussion alludes directly back to the question of authorship. It is not Fiore’s consistency with his pseudonymous viewpoint that is questioned here, but rather whether Paul, or a close associate of his, was able to shift his eschatological views over the passage of time. Finally, arriving at Fiore’s work on Titus, he notes that the end-time cast is absent here, as opposed to 1 and 2 Timothy (204 n. 12; e.g., 1 Tim 4.1). One wonders whether Fiore may be caught in a bit of contradiction in his evaluation of Titus’s household code in 1:12–13, where Fiore notes that “the present age” mentioned in 1:12 is “consistent with the other PE” (e.g., 1 Tim 4.8) in viewing the “present in anticipation of the end time” (e.g., 1:13; 211 n. 12). Moreover, concerning 1:13, Fiore notes that when

speaking of God's glory, Titus "hews more closely to the LXX tradition in speaking of the glory of the great God appearing at the end-time" (211 n. 13).

These minor quibbles should not detract from the value in Fiore's work. I suspect many of these minor difficulties could be rectified with a larger-scale commentary where space is less of a constraint. Fiore has advanced discussion of the Pastoral Epistles by his careful consideration of historical factors, his judicious use of Greco-Roman sources, and his delightful observations on how the Pastoral Epistles may be a voice to today's church.