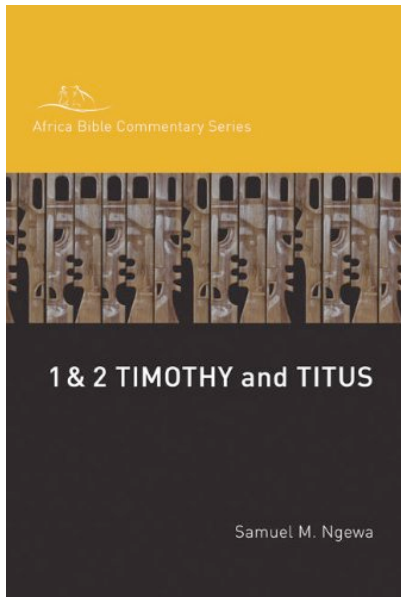


RBL 07/2010



**Ngewa, Samuel M.**

***1 and 2 Timothy and Titus***

Africa Bible Commentary Series

Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009. Pp. xxii + 466. Paper.  
\$21.99. ISBN 9966805389.

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For full appreciation, Samuel Ngewa's commentary on 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus needs to be located in the hermeneutics of the cultural climate that inspired it, as the author himself noted (xvii). In 2006, the *Africa Bible Commentary*, a one-volume commentary compiled by seventy African scholars from across the continent, of the Association of Evangelicals in Africa, was launched in Nairobi. It was intended to equip "pastors, students and preachers" with "a resource that would expound the Word of God in words that were intelligible to Africa" and thus enable them "to grasp the essential message of the gospel from Genesis to Revelation" (xix). The Africa Bible Commentary Series is a spin-off from this one-volume commentary. It aims to apply in greater depth to individual books of the Bible the life-centered and pastoral approach of the one-volume commentary. This is noted in both the foreword of Ngwega's book by Solomon Andriatsimalomanarivo, Professor of Theology and Pastor at Abidjan (xix) and on the back dust jacket. Ngewa's commentary on 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus (the Pastoral Epistles) is the first commentary of the series. These Pastoral Epistles are reportedly chosen to launch the series because they focus on church leaders and pastors who "need to examine themselves in the light of Scripture" so as "to lead the people of God in a way that conforms to Scripture" (xix). The rationale is that, if their faith and knowledge of Scripture is strong, that of the people they lead will equally be strong and vice versa.

Ngwega's commentary thus has a clearly defined pastoral focus, born of his "desire to contribute to my fellow pastors" to help them become better persons and "shepherds of the flock," as people "who truly know their work" (xxi). This well-defined pastoral goal directed at evangelical pastors, students, teachers, and small-group Bible study constitutes the organizing principle of the entire commentary. The reader needs to be aware of this and bear it in mind as a guide in reading the work.

Structurally, the book has a general "Introduction to the Pastoral Epistles" covering all three works (1–3). This is followed by a separate treatment of each epistle. Instead of chapters, the main body of the commentary on each epistle is divided into units (19 units for 1 Timothy, 15 for 2 Timothy, 7 for Titus), with "Questions for Discussion" at the end of each unit. In the first unit of each book, titled "Making Contact," the author treats such questions as authorship, addressee, salutation, and (for 2 Timothy) Paul's attitude to Timothy, for Ngwega upholds the traditional position that assigns the authorship of these Pastoral Epistles, which he dates between A.D. 63 and 67, to Paul (3). Case studies at the end of four units (a kind of excursus) further underscore a key point of the given unit. Thus the "Case Study" on the "Practical Care of Widows" (124) wraps up unit 14 of 1 Timothy on "Relating to People in Need"; "A Leader's Social Skills" (135) expands the key points of unit 15 of 1 Timothy on "Relating to Church Leaders"; the "Relationship between Pastors" (175–76) expatiates on unit 1 of 2 Timothy on "Making Contacts"; and "Working Together for Change" (189–90) consolidates the comments in unit 5 of Titus on "Promoting Sound Doctrine." Extensive and elaborate notes for each of the three books come sequentially at the end of the entire work, with the notes for each book numbered serially: 411 notes for 1 Timothy (417–38), 435 for 2 Timothy (439–56), and 213 for Titus (457–64), making a total of 1,058 notes. These notes discuss the meaning of Greek words and phrases, provide bibliographical data, and engage in discussions with other scholars on various issues. A short bibliography for all three epistles (465–66) concludes the work.

In keeping with its goal of meeting the needs of pastors, the dominant style of the commentary is homiletic. To this end, Ngwega interweaves ad lib African stories and practices into the commentary, without separating the commentary on the text (in its context) from contemporary African issues (the reader's context). With a few exceptions, each unit begins with a reference to an existential situation or a biblical text as a way of foregrounding the message of the unit in the reader's life context. Thus unit 4 of 1 Timothy on "Paul's Personal Reflection" is introduced by "When we make time for personal reflection, we discover something about who we are. Unfortunately we do not do this often enough. This was true of a godly man like King David." Then follows two paragraphs on David's lack of reflection about himself, especially "at the time of his adulterous relationship with Bathsheba, Uriah's wife," and a further word on the

essentiality of reflection for “spiritual renewal” as a lead in to how we can grasp the “glimpse” Paul gives us “of his own reflections on his present and past life” in 1 Tim 1:12–14 (24–25).

Each unit has many subheadings that help users to easily identify the main topics addressed in the unit. For instance, unit 6 on 1 Tim 2:1–8, titled “Paul’s Call to Prayer,” has the subheadings “Components of Prayer,” “Who to Pray For,” “What to Pray For,” “Who We Pray To,” “What Makes Prayer Possible,” “Paul’s Role,” and “How to Pray” (38–48). This outlay gives the work the appearance of a handbook. The work is written in language and style that are easy to understand.

Throughout the work, Ngwega makes an appreciable effort to grapple with the meaning of Greek words and to situate the epistles in their first-century sociopolitical and geographical contexts. The work contains snapshot information on such issues as the political backgrounds of Ephesus (13) and Crete (336), where 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus are located, respectively, and on sociocultural practices and customs of the period, such as rules for athletes (213) and expectations from slaves. This type of information is dotted through the commentary. For instance, Ngwega explains the advice in 2 Timothy that he “is to endure hardships *like a good soldier of Christ Jesus* (2:3b)” by noting that “Paul knew soldiers well for he had often been their prisoner” (210) and that “Roman law explicitly” forbade “men engaged on military service to engage in civilian occupations.” The reason for this prohibition “to take on a second job” was to ensure that soldiers gave undivided attention to their military profession, or because they wanted “*to please their commanding officer* (2:4b).” Then Ngwega laments that, unlike these soldiers, who wanted to please their commanding officers, “the church does not always obey its commander [Jesus]. When it fails to follow his strategy and instead lets society determine its agenda it risks defeat” (211). These contextual features, in particular, distinguish the book from the usual television preaching that dominates the media, especially in Africa and that can go from Genesis to Revelation without any consideration of the actual life circumstances that produced each book.

Certain limitations make the work difficult to follow. Direct quotations from the epistles are set unconventionally in italics and run into the text, while those from modern authors and phrases from the epistles cited for discussion are set with quotation marks, though this is not always consistent. Example, “This instruction to *keep your head in all situations* [4:5a] could also be translated ‘Be sober in all things’ [NASB]” (295). Again, Paul “describes his crown as *the crown of righteousness* (4:8a)”; this “crown of righteousness is actually eternal life,” according to a modern author (304). The constant switch from italics to regular font face is rather confusing. It would have been helpful if the author had

provided some guide to the reader on this and other peculiar methodological features of the commentary.

While the work is in units, the visibility of the text could have been improved upon, by placing next to a given subheading the verse of the issue treated. Even the verb reference to a unit is set in dark background, while the subheadings are set in bold against a white background. This makes the text appear invisible throughout the commentary. Given the discernibly scholarly backdrop of the book, one would have expected the transliteration of Greek words to follow the normal standard: *mysterion* instead of *musterion*; *kyrios* instead of *kurios* (369), especially since *kerygma* is correctly transliterated. The same applies to the lack of distinction between the short and long vowels: *epsilon* (*e*) and *eta* (*ē*); *omicron* (*o*) and *omega* (*ō*).

In conclusion, it is impossible to do justice to a commentary that is deliberately set into units for preaching. How does one comment on the faith-based insights of an author/pastor on the Pastoral Epistles shared with fellow pastors, teachers, and preachers? Many pastors will appreciate the commentary for its simplicity of language, its rich concrete application to life, and its rich use of stories that the reader can easily identify with even if he or she is not African. Some readers will also appreciate its effort to show sensitivity in dealing with the thorny issue of the treatment of women in the Pastorals. But few would agree with the author that the Pastorals were written by Paul himself in the late 60s.

The book is the first in the revamped Africa Bible Commentary Series. An African Bible Commentary Series existed in the early 1980s. The project was reportedly sponsored by the World Council of Churches (WCC, Geneva). Unlike this nascent commentary series, the other was ecumenical in character and directed at academia. The criticism leveled against the one or two volumes published was that it was not African enough. Now this new commentary series of the Evangelical Association is also titled the Africa Bible Commentary Series. Will this homiletic evangelical approach now be branded as *the African way of reading Scripture*? Might it not be best to label the series “Africa Bible Commentary: Evangelical *Homiletic* Series”? In many ways, this approach recalls that of the early fathers of the church before the dawn of the modern critical Bible commentary. African biblical scholarship is open to a diversity of ways of reading Scripture collaboratively: reading between women and men scholars, between scholars and “reading with” or “listening with/to” ordinary readers. As scholars dialogue with these types of reading, it might also be fruitful also to dialogue with the homiletic approach of this series.

When all is said and done, Ngwega is to be commended for achieving what he clearly set out to do, to equip his fellow pastors with tools for preaching the Pastorals, using an approach or language that is easy to follow. His personal faith stance is also evident in the commentary.

Rightly does the back dust jacket describe the book's "key features" as "easy to understand writings style"; "organized into sermon units for use in preaching" (and small group Bible studies), providing both "African case studies and illustrations for contextual application"; "questions for discussion after each unit"; and "endnotes explaining the Greek and academic discussions."