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BOOK REVIEW

Samuel M. Ngewa. *1 & 2 Timothy and Titus*. Africa Bible Commentary Series. Grand Rapids: Hippo Books (Zondervan et al.), 2009. xxii + 466 pp. Pbk. US\$21.99.

This is the first volume to appear in a commentary series from Hippo Books that follows from their one-volume *Africa Bible Commentary* edited by Tukurbo Adeyemoh and published in 2006. Ngewa, who has a PhD from Westminster Theological Seminary, is professor of New Testament Studies at the Nairobi Evangelical Graduate School of Theology in Nairobi, Kenya. Besides authoring this volume, he is the series editor for the New Testament volumes generally.

The intended audience from this commentary is mainly a wide range of African readers. The text is divided into preaching/ teaching units. Each section starts with an illustration from African life, continues with an exegesis of the text, makes application to African Christian life and church life, and concludes with discussion questions. Thus, it should be useful for small group study as well as being a resource for preachers preparing sermons. The extensive endnotes contain the more technical material such as discussion of the Greek text and documentation of references to various Bible versions and scholarly works, making the book useful for scholars also. The bibliography includes twenty-eight commentaries on the Pastoral Epistles, and Ngewa interacts with them constantly. Thus there is no effort to be “African” by separating the work from the insights and tradition of research of scholars from the West. Rather, the Africanness of this book comes out clearly in the illustrations, applications, and occasionally, the insights into meaning, that come from the African context.

For years I taught Bible in Nigeria, and was frustrated by the irrelevance of many comments in the books in our college library. For example, one well-respected commentary on 1 Corinthians, discussing the passage on eating meat offered to idols, said, "Of course, this is not a problem for Christians today." It was an important problem, however, for my students, and for millions of believers outside the West. It is thus extremely refreshing to read a commentary that recognizes the questions that Christians in Africa are asking of the biblical text.

Should non-Africans use this commentary? By all means. There is nothing that helps bring freshness to the text like looking at it through the eyes of people coming at it from a different background. And though Westerners may at first glance think that they are free of some of the social problems addressed in this commentary, on second thought we may find more that is applicable to our society than we think. It is also salutary for Westerners to experience what non-Westerners have had to cope with for centuries, that is, interpretations of the biblical text that focus on issues that are of less importance to us and that may be silent about our most pressing concerns. As Christianity becomes more and more of a truly "world" religion, and as the center of gravity of the church shifts to the majority world, if the teaching and preaching of Westerners is to be relevant to the whole body of Christ, people from the West must be able to understand and interpret the text in ways that will benefit all believers. Non-Westerners are within easy reach of urban churches throughout the West, and the preaching of the Bible needs to be made relevant to them. Preachers and teachers outside of Africa who minister to people of African background will find this commentary a good resource.

There are a few things that could be improved in subsequent volumes in this series. Although the commentary is billed as "African," it quickly becomes evident that the viewpoint and most of the illustrations could more accurately be called "East African." People from other parts of the continent may easily feel like saying "What the author describes is not true of people here." Given the great diversity in the continent, this is almost unavoidable. Perhaps in future volumes, there could be more

effort to find illustrations and applications from all parts of Africa. It is also hoped that the authors in the series will be drawn from all parts of the continent.

Another thing that could be noted is that some of the comments about the Greek language are somewhat outdated, showing reliance on older commentaries and grammars, and no interaction with the newer ways of interpreting especially the use of Greek tenses.

Overall, this commentary is a great achievement. African biblical scholarship is constantly hampered by lack of access to scholarly, up-to-date material (largely for economic reasons), barriers of language both within the continent (where over 2000 languages are used) and between Africa and the world of English and German scholarship (where most of the resources are), constant interruption of electricity supply that plays havoc with modern methods of information storage and retrieval, and disruption of work due to the instability of society brought about by political and religious upheaval and criminal activity. If the series can be successfully completed, this will be an even more spectacular achievement. The church worldwide can only be enriched by African contributions of this calibre.

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