

Oswaldo Padilla. *The Pastoral Epistles: An Introduction and Commentary*. Tyndale New Testament Commentaries. Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2022. 284pp. + 29pp. (front matter).

One of the first offerings of the fledgling Tyndale Commentary series was the 1957 volume on the Pastorals, written by Donald Guthrie, who revised his work in 1990.¹ Through his commentary work, his popular *New Testament Introduction*, and other writings, Guthrie became well known for defending the authenticity of the letters against their detractors.² Now, after sixty-five years of Guthrie's name gracing the TNTC Pastorals volume, Oswaldo Padilla, professor of divinity at Beeson Divinity School, has provided a new edition, his first foray into commentary writing.³ His volume is evangelical and egalitarian in its stance, robust for the series in which it appears, and lucid in its style.

Padilla aims to contribute to the understanding of the Pastorals through significant interaction with primary source material and serious theologizing in conversation with Christian dogmatics (x). Given the brevity of the commentary, he largely accomplishes his goals with a work that is well researched and often insightful in its own right, not merely the mediation of larger commentaries for a popular audience. The bibliography is impressive, including French and German works that inform the commentary throughout. Padilla engages scholarship on the letters well overall, including newer contributions by Gerald Bray, Jens Herzer, Chris Hoklotubbe, Lyn Kidson, Jermo van Nes, and Robert Yarbrough, though his complete omission of William Mounce's WBC volume is surprising. He speaks of well-known Pastorals scholars Spicq, Marshall, Towner, Johnson, Oberlinner, and (especially) Malherbe as influential for his work (ix).

Padilla believes the Pastorals are Pauline and does so fundamentally because of the testimony of Scripture itself (2, 10). He expands this understanding with five standard reasons supporting authenticity (1–16): (1) Scripture sees Paul as author. (2) The early church rejected false writings. (3) The early church accepted the Pastorals as Pauline. (4) Arguments for pseudonymity are flawed. (5) The consensus for pseudonymity seems unduly influenced by academic and social pressures (a point elevated by Luke Timothy Johnson, and one still well worth pressing). Padilla's comments on 1 Timothy are refreshing: "The words of Paul in this letter are the written word of God and must be taken as possessing the authority of God himself. To read the letter otherwise is to read against the grain of the document, thereby compromising the reader's potential understanding of it" (47). In the commentary, he points out instances of such potential interpretative compromise, as when Paul's self-portrait in 1 Timothy 1:12–17 is read as pseudonymous (65). He dates 2 Timothy to the mid-60s but leaves open the time of composition for 1 Timothy and Titus.

¹ Steve Motyer, "Donald Guthrie," in *Bible Interpreters of the Twentieth Century: A Selection of Evangelical Voices*, ed. Walter A. Elwell and J. D. Weaver (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 287–98.

² Donald Guthrie, *The Pastoral Epistles and the Mind of Paul* (London: Tyndale, 1955); *New Testament Introduction*, 4th ed. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1990), 607–59; "Timothy and Titus, Epistles to," in *New Bible Dictionary*, ed. D. R. W. Wood, 3rd ed. (Leicester, UK: InterVarsity, 1996), 1189–92.

³ Padilla has published *The Speeches of Outsiders in Acts: Poetics, Theology and Historiography*, SNTSMS 144 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); and *The Acts of the Apostles: Interpretation, History and Theology* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2016). He has commentaries on James (BECNT) and Matthew (Proclamation) in preparation.

Interestingly, Padilla confronts the growing trend of discarding the title “Pastoral Epistles.”⁴ While recognizing benefits of considering each writing separately, Padilla argues that setting aside this collective designation focuses too narrowly on the letters’ historical circumstances and not enough on their theological unity. Padilla’s corrective offers helpful nuance, but he may *overcorrect* at times in his corpus reading. For instance, his introduction seems to conflate the three letters’ data on their opponents. While acknowledging that the particulars of the false teaching in view are “difficult to know with exactness” and “unclear,” and with only one citation from Titus in the discussion, Padilla proposes that the “false teaching was broadly similar in the situations presented in all three letters” (24–25) and proceeds accordingly, suggesting that the opponents were Jewish Christians with ascetic tendencies.⁵ And while the discussion of theological themes in the letters collectively (God, salvation, the Christian life, the church) is salutary, more attention to the thematic profile of each letter would have been welcome.

Padilla’s labors in the commentary proper are ambitious and assiduous. Most remarkable is its interaction with Greco-Roman moral philosophers, whether their general practices and vocabulary, or matters connected with a specific school (Stoics, Cynics, Epicureans) or figure (e.g., Seneca, Epictetus). Taking his cue from the work of Abraham Malherbe, Padilla does not intend merely to provide points of comparison and contrast to Paul. Instead, he understands Paul to be purposefully adopting and adapting certain language and ideas which would have resonated with his hearers (63). Padilla’s work here is helpful both for better understanding the worldview common in Paul’s day and for considering some of the letters’ atypical vocabulary, though the commentary’s unrelenting attention to Greco-Roman philosophical connections seems at times overzealous.

The commentary work helpfully advances earlier editions by dividing the analysis of each textual unit into discussion of context, content, and theology. Padilla offers not only exegesis of the text but also some degree of interaction with theologians ranging from Calvin to Bavinck to Barth. His exegesis is grounded firmly in the Greek text, though the commentary is accessible for those without knowledge of the language. Padilla addresses text-critical matters, a *desideratum* in some commentaries twice the size, and provides occasional forays into pastoral and liturgical application. In what follows, to provide a sense of Padilla’s approach to the letters, I will note some of his interpretive choices in passages typically of interest.

A new commentary on the Pastorals is doubtless often first opened to 1 Timothy 2:11–14, and it is instructive to observe the movement in the Tyndale series’ treatment of this *crux interpretum*. Guthrie in 1957 asserted that “the teaching of Christian doctrine . . . is confined by Paul to the male sex” and spoke of “the greater aptitude of the weaker sex to be led astray,” though noting that “there may have been local reasons for this prohibition of which we know nothing.”⁶ Guthrie’s 1990 revision shifted his language: “The teaching of Christian doctrine *seems to be* confined by Paul to the male sex,”

⁴ This trend was given impetus in Philip Towner’s 2006 NICNT commentary, accordingly titled *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*.

⁵ For a preferable methodological approach, consult Dillon Thornton, *Hostility in the House of God: An Investigation of the Opponents in 1 and 2 Timothy*, BBRSup 15 (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2016).

⁶ *Pastoral Epistles*, 1st ed., 76.

but “it may be possible to regard verse 12 as a relative rather than absolute prohibition. . . . Was Paul, in fact, saying that no woman should teach without first taking time to learn . . . ?”⁷ In the third edition, Padilla now states categorically, “Paul’s prohibition of women teaching men in the congregations at Ephesus was based on a problem of *character* not gender. . . . This text should not be the basis for the denial of women’s ordination” (95–96, emphasis original).

Padilla’s interpretation affirms the standard egalitarian argument that *authentēō* (“exercise authority,” ESV) in 1 Timothy 2:12 is “without question . . . pejorative” (94). That is, Paul sees the problem not merely as women exercising the authority over men that is associated with teaching the congregation but “instruct[ing] the men in a ‘heavy-handed,’ domineering and disrespectful fashion” (94). Additionally, the false teaching had made inroads especially among the church’s women, and their propagation of it needed to be halted (26, 86, 192, 195–97, 250). Padilla argues that Paul appeals to Genesis not to provide a rationale for excluding women from public teaching altogether, but to illustrate what happens when women seek to dominate the men who are appointed to teach them (95). The debate is too involved to engage in detail here, but two observations may be made. (1) Certain points that Padilla makes to support his understanding—Paul’s call for womanly *sōphrosynē* (“self-control,” ESV) that frames the passage (2:9, 15), the need for a good testimony among outsiders, Eve’s creation as Adam’s helper, and the circumstances of the Fall as an instructive illustration—seem as if they would support a complementarian understanding of the passage equally well, or even better. (2) Because Padilla’s case rests heavily upon the definition of *authentēō*, he would have done well to engage the most recent edition of the key complementarian volume on the passage, edited by Andreas Köstenberger and Thomas Schreiner.⁸ There, Köstenberger responds to the sort of objection Padilla raises against his work on *authentēō*, and Al Wolters provides his most recent treatment of the term, finding it *non-pejorative*.

Interpretations of 1 Timothy 2:15 vary enough that there may be no “majority position,” strictly speaking, but Padilla’s understanding is not uncommon. He understands *sōzō* (“saved,” ESV) as deliverance from sin and explains, “If the women at Ephesus are to be saved, they need to reject the pattern of women who rejected the feminine cardinal virtue *sōphrosyne*.” Instead, Christian women should “follow the pattern that is ‘proper for women who profess reverence for God’ (v. 10), which includes a virtuous home life, with the bearing of children” (96).

In 1 Timothy 3, Padilla finds a good deal of overlap between deacons and overseers, arguing that “holding the mystery of the faith” (v. 9; cf. Titus 1:9) parallels “able to teach” (v. 2) and supports an understanding of the office of deacon that involves a teaching ministry—an interpretation that seems difficult to sustain. He suggests that “the overseers *tended* to concentrate on teaching and pastoral care, while the deacons *tended* to concentrate more on assistance to the overseers and congregation. But their respective functions were not as sealed off from one another as is often thought” (109, emphasis original). Padilla sees the “women” of 3:11 as female deacons, who as such were involved in the

⁷ *Pastoral Epistles*, 2nd ed., 86, 90 (emphasis added).

⁸ Andreas J. Köstenberger and Thomas R. Schreiner, eds., *Women in the Church: An Interpretation and Application of 1 Timothy 2:9–15*, 3rd ed. (Wheaton: Crossway, 2016). In the interest of full disclosure, note that I assisted in the preparation of this volume.

teaching ministry of the church (39, 107). His view of the two offices and the role of women in the church leads him to assert, “The leaders in the churches must be godly men and women who have been gifted by the Holy Spirit to teach the Scriptures competently and care pastorally for the congregation, similarly to the way parents care for their children” (110). In response, while it is true that older men and women are described in 5:1–2 in a way that suggests a general fatherly and motherly role in the church, it is noteworthy that 3:1–7 clearly envisions males as overseers.⁹ Following the work of Andrew Clarke, Padilla also distinguishes elders as church leaders generally (not officeholders) from the overseer (typically one of the elders) as filling a formal office (239).

Padilla rightly doubts that 1 Timothy 5 describes an order of widows (and, oddly, omits discussion of 5:7–8) but understands Paul simply to address a case of limited resources in the church. Unusually, though, while he understands the “one-woman man” of 1 Timothy 3:2 and Titus 1:6 to mean a man who is faithful to his wife (106, 242), he interprets the “one-man woman” in 1 Timothy 5:9 more specifically as an *univira*, a widow who had vowed not to remarry and was thus particularly vulnerable financially. He finds the disputed verse 12 to envision young widows apostatizing in marrying unbelievers, rather than renegeing on an initial vow of service (129–30).

Padilla frames his discussion of 2 Timothy 3:16–17 in terms of an “orthodox and evangelical understanding of inspiration” against “a liberal view of the Bible” (209), emphasizing the “divine authority” resulting from inspiration (207). He does not mention inerrancy as a corollary of 2 Timothy 3:16 in his commentary discussion and elsewhere has noted, “While, to be sure, the assertion of the God-breathed nature of Scripture provides it with considerable trustworthiness, it is a caricature to say that the text is directly dealing with ‘the pristine character of the autographs.’”¹⁰ In describing God speaking through Scripture, Padilla quotes without comment both Calvin and Barth in the same breath (206–7), apparently seeing more continuity between their views than is warranted.¹¹

The elder’s children in Titus 1:6 as *pistos* are not understood to be “trustworthy” but “believers.” Padilla leans on the Greco-Roman understanding that children in a household normally adopted the religion of their father, arguing that an elder’s children not doing so would have bespoken his incompetence and hindered gospel ministry. Padilla allows that a different cultural understanding, as in the West today, would modify the requirement.

Padilla’s volume has many strengths, not least its unapologetic embrace of Pauline authorship and engagement of the Greco-Roman context. I often found myself nodding along with and gaining insight from Padilla’s clear textual exposition. Those who read the Pastorals from an egalitarian stance

⁹ For a view similar to Padilla’s in terms of deacon authority, but which maintains the teaching office as limited to overseers and for males only, see Benjamin Merkle, “The Authority of Deacons in Pauline Churches,” *JETS* 64, vol. 2 (2021): 309–25.

¹⁰ Osvaldo Padilla, “Postconservative Theologians and Scriptural Authority,” in D. A. Carson, ed., *The Enduring Authority of the Christian Scriptures* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016), 654. This essay provides a fuller discussion of 2 Timothy 3:16 in response to Stanley Grenz.

¹¹ The discontinuity is demonstrated in, e.g., David Gibson, “The Answering Speech of Men: Karl Barth on Holy Scripture,” in Carson, *Enduring Authority*, 277–82. The content of Padilla’s 2017 ETS session, “Postliberals and Inerrancy: Do They Point the Way Forward?,” suggests more sympathy with Barth’s understanding of inspiration than many conservative interpreters would be comfortable with.

will find the work to be a helpful and robust summary treatment of the letters. Padilla's interpretive decisions, however, place the volume into a niche that will make it less likely an acquisition for complementarian interpreters: those looking for a robust egalitarian reading of the Pastorals as a foil will want something more thorough, while pastors and scholars looking for a concise and informed exposition of the text will find a good deal to appreciate, but not as useful a work as they might desire.

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