

of the trinity; to that end this is a helpful and erudite contribution.

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Revelation. A New Covenant Commentary
New Covenant Commentary Series, 18
Gordon D. Fee

Eugene, OR: Cascade Books (Wipf & Stock), 2011;
332 pp, \$ 37, pb, ISBN 978-1-60899-431-1

RÉSUMÉ

Ce commentaire sur l'Apocalypse constitue un manuel clair et utile, qui se lit facilement. Il n'entre pas dans la discussion sur les diverses interprétations. Fee considère que l'empire romain est la cible principale de la critique prophétique dans l'Apocalypse. Malgré l'objectif annoncé de la série, ce volume ne sera pas d'une grande utilité aux pasteurs et enseignants.

SUMMARY

Gordon Fee's commentary on Revelation is a clear and helpful support which reads fluently and does not interact with other interpreters. The Roman Empire is seen as the main object of Revelation's prophetic criticism. Despite the ostensible aim of the series in which it appears, the commentary does not contain much help for preachers and teachers.

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Gordon Fees Kommentar zum Buch der Offenbarung erweist sich als verständlicher, hilfreicher Beitrag. Er läßt sich flüssig lesen und setzt sich nicht mit anderen Auslegern auseinander. Als Hauptziel der prophetischen Kritik in der Offenbarung wird das Römische Weltreich angesehen. Trotz des offensichtlichen Zieles der Reihe, in welcher der Kommentar erscheint, enthält er keine große Hilfe für Prediger und Lehrer.

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When I picked up this commentary, my first response was: 'No, not another commentary series!?' There are now more series of commentaries on the New Testament than any person can reasonably consult. Every publishing company wants to have its own series and some run several series. The *New Covenant Commentary Series* is announced as a series with contributors from all continents which will explicitly pay attention to the meaning of the text for the people of God. It is the first series by American publishers Wipf and Stock.

Gordon Fee's introduction to the volume on Revelation is surprisingly short. On just 11 pages he says a few (very useful) things about the book's genre, authorship, reason for writing and date – but more thorny issues

such as the book's structure and its social and historical background are not touched upon. Fee merely states that he thinks some elements of Revelation have already occurred but will occur again. One also expects some discussion of John's use of the Old Testament and intertestamental literature as well as an overview of the main schools of interpretation in the introduction – but these are absent

The commentary itself is written in running style with the words under discussion in bold print so that it reads fluently. Fee entirely refrains from interacting with other commentators; as a result the book has few footnotes. He systematically shows how John uses elements from the Old Testament to describe his visions and he often expresses his admiration for John's 'literary artistry'. Fee frequently comments on the rendering of the Greek text by the NIV but in such a way that no knowledge of Greek is necessary to understand the comment. If the meaning of a word or phrase is unclear, he is not ashamed to admit this. The translation that Fee uses as basis for his work, the NIV 2011, is printed in full. He regularly discusses the decisions made by the revisers of this edition, of whom he was one; apart from these places, in my opinion the translation merely uses up valuable space.

Fee states that he divides Revelation into two main parts, chapters 1-11 and 12-22. Yet more importantly he seems to take everything up to chapter 16 as 'prelude' to the last, eschatological battle which is described in chapters 17-20. In line with this, chapters 15-16 are described as concerning the 'penultimate' events (207); 14:14-20 is taken as a separate section of which 14:14-16 anticipates chapters 21-22 and 14:17-20 anticipates chapters 17-20. The notorious passage 20:1-6 is treated as describing no more than 'an interlude' in the 'last battle' in between 'the divine overthrow of the unholy triumvirate' and 'the final judgement of all evil' (280).

The main target of John's criticism throughout the book, according to Fee, is the Roman Empire. Not that there is already much persecution of Christians at the time of writing, but as a prophet John foresees persecution in the near future – which indeed came in the second and third centuries AD. Fee argues that Revelation was written at the end of the first century and that 8:8-9 reflect the eruption of the Vesuvius in AD 79.

Within the exposition there are not many hints at what the text means for contemporary believers although after three sections (chs. 2-3; 4-6; 21:1 – 22:5) there is a brief separate unit called 'Fusing the horizons'. I wonder why there are not more such units, especially given the series' aim of paying attention to the meaning of the text as mentioned above. At the end of the book one finds a short bibliography and an index of texts.

Fee's commentary is one of several good, medium sized commentaries that have already appeared this century. Of the others I want to mention Ben Witherington's (2003) and Joseph Mangina's recent volume in the series of SCM Theological Commentaries. The latter is

the richest in theology and application but also the most demanding of the three.

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Deification in Christian Theology

Stephan Finlan and Vladimir Kharlamov (eds.)

Cambridge: James Clarke & Co, 2010; 194 pp.

\$42.50; ISBN: 9780227173299

SUMMARY

Deification (Greek: *theosis*) is an important concept in the Orthodox Churches but disputed in the West. The present volume of essays largely on the biblical material and the Early Church is an important contribution to a necessary debate. The book is well researched and it is regrettable that modern debate is not well represented. From the West there are no essays by Lutherans, Methodists or Pentecostals, only a good one by the Reformed Myk Habets.

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

„Gottwerdung“ (im Griechischen *theosis*) ist in den orthodoxen Kirchen ein wichtiger Begriff, aber im Westen recht umstritten. Der vorliegende Aufsatzband geht hauptsächlich über biblisches Material und die Urgemeinde und leistet einen wichtigen Beitrag zu einer unerlässlichen Auseinandersetzung. Das Buch stellt eine gründliche Studie dar; es ist nur bedauerlich, dass die gegenwärtige Debatte zum Thema nicht ausreichend vertreten ist. Aus dem westlichen Lager gibt es keine Aufsätze von Lutheranern, Methodisten oder Pfingstlern, sondern nur einen guten Beitrag von reformierter Seite durch Myk Habets.

RÉSUMÉ

La notion de la déification (*theosis* en grec), controversée en Occident, joue un rôle important dans les Églises orthodoxes. Le présent ouvrage contribue au débat de manière utile et nécessaire en considérant l'enseignement biblique et celui de l'Église ancienne. La recherche y est bien menée, mais on peut regretter que le débat actuel n'y retienne pas une attention suffisante. Parmi les contributions représentant le point de vue occidental, aucune ne provient de luthériens, de méthodistes ou de pentecôtistes ; on doit se contenter d'un bon texte du réformé Myk Habets.

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Deification is the transformation of believers into the likeness of God. While Christian monotheism does not support the notion of any literally becoming 'god', the New Testament speaks of a transformation of mind, character, vision and mission towards those of Jesus and an imitation of God. None of these passages spells out the concept in detail, however. The idea of deification was often mentioned in the Early Church but the term 'deification' (Greek *theosis*) was only coined by Gregory of Nazianzus in the fourth century. Even though

the term has taken many meanings in church history, nowadays it is used to designate all instances where any idea occurs of taking on God's character or being made divine. In the Orthodox Churches, the Old Oriental Churches, and the Oriental Churches in Union with the Roman-Catholic Church, the term plays a central role as salvation from an unholy life to partaking in the holy life of God himself. For the Orthodox, *theosis* is the process of a believer becoming free of sin (in the general meaning) and being united with God, beginning in this life and later consummated in bodily resurrection.

The Oriental concept of deification has often fallen prey to confessionalism as the Orthodox were blamed to believe that humans could become God. Deification was seen as a pagan idea by e.g. Adolf Harnack (9). The editors want to overcome this static warfare, arguing that *theosis* never meant 'becoming God' or giving up the distinction between creator and creation; see the leading Romanian theologian Dumitru Staniloae, who emphasises that *theosis* may not be taken literally (161).

Two Orthodox academics working at Drew University edited the present volume to examine the history of the concept, and they invited contributors from other confessions. Besides the introduction by the editors, there are chapters on Judaism and the Old Testament (Gregory Glazov), on 2 Peter 1:4 (Stephen Finlan), on the Apostolic Fathers, on the Apologists of the second century (both Vladimir Kharlamov), on Irenaeus, on Athanasius (both Jeffrey Finch), on Augustine (Robert Puchniak), on Maximus the Confessor (Elena Vishnevskaya), on Soloviev (Stephen Finlan) and 'Reforming Theosis', a chapter by a Reformed scholar evaluating the concept of deification (Myk Habets). The Evangelical theologian Thomas C. Oden says of this book: 'An extraordinary collaboration of scholars examining the neglected theme of deification in the classic Christian tradition from its biblical roots through Irenaeus, Augustine, and Maximus, to contemporary reconstructions of Torrance and Soloviev.'

It is not always clear whether this book is more a historical investigation or an Orthodox defence of the concept. One wished there would have been an essay on the history of the criticism of the concept and a clearer presentation of the possible differences between the classic presentations of soteriology in Reformation times in regard to *theosis* as part of the process of salvation. The subject is important for Protestants and Evangelicals, but getting closer to each other is only possible if the possible obstacles are clearly stated. Subsequently the Bible and its interpretation in the history of the Church should be studied.

For Evangelicals, exegesis will play a major role in evaluating the concept and this volume is a good starting point to do so. Clearly there are enough texts to be explained, not only in the New Testament but also in the Old. The issue is not to deny that believers become 'participants of the divine nature', but how to interpret this in the light of all of Scripture. In this book Gre-