

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-

gory Glazov examines Old Testament covenant theology, divine adoption, bearing the fruit of knowledge and attaining the stature of a tree of righteousness in Proverbs, Isaiah and Sirach.

As all articles are well researched and shed new light on the whole debate, I want to confine myself to two remarks and then concentrate on the article of Habets. First, I do not understand why the article on Vladimir Soloviev is included. Bible and Early Church is a given, but Soloviev is a modern poet of comedy. At most I would have made it an appendix.

Second, Finlan takes it for granted that 2 Peter was written around AD 100 (32) and interprets the letter accordingly. This surely is not in line with the thinking of the Church Fathers and traditional theology, on which so much emphasis is laid in this volume. [Ed.: see the article by Prof. Van Houwelingen in this Journal, issue 19.2.]

An exception among the authors is the Reformed theologian Myk Habets, both as a Protestant and because he compares Orthodox teaching with Reformed theology. He compares theosis to the 'heart of Reformed theology', union with Christ, which 'is compatible with a doctrine of theosis' (147). According to Habets, Calvin's comment on 2 Peter 1:4 could have been written by an Orthodox theologian because his emphasis on 'union with Christ' (148-150) is very similar to the Orthodox position and was taken up by theologians in his line like Jonathan Edwards and even Karl Barth. At length Habets describes the positive appraisal of theosis by the Scottish Reformed theologian Thomas F. Torrance. For Habets (and Torrance), the second biblical and Reformed concept in line with theosis is 'imago dei'. Humans are the image of God, but this image has been destroyed by sin. Through salvation, this image is restored and believers will be transformed into the real image of God, who is Jesus, the Son of God. [Ed.: see also Myk Habets, *Theosis in the Theology of Thomas Torrance* (Aldershot; Ashgate, 2009) ISBN: 0754667995.]

In response I would say that there are many concepts in the Bible that make a doctrine of deification possible, as long as the concept is not taken to mean that we become God. We are created in God's image and will be transformed into the image of God, Jesus Christ. We are indwelt by the Holy Spirit and Jesus is in us (and we in him). All this leads to the concept of becoming holy which is central not only to all holiness movements but to all Protestant revivals and Evangelical movements. For Protestants the same questions concerning the relationship between salvation and theosis arise as concerning salvation and sanctification. At this point the real discussion should have started. It is a pity that in this book only a Reformed scholar (Habets) interacts with theosis but no Lutherans (who are mainly critical of 'deification'), Methodists (who are mostly positive, starting with John Wesley) or Pentecostal theologians.

Thomas Schirrmacher

Paul Unbound: Other Perspectives on the Apostle

Mark D. Given (ed.)

Peabody: Hendrickson; Edinburgh: Alban Books, 2010; xix + 210 pp. Pb.; ISBN 978-1-59856-324-5. £17

SUMMARY

This is a useful volume of essays on the topics Paul and politics, Paul and patronage (and wider economic issues), the identification of Paul's opponents, Paul and ethnicity, Paul and the law (with a 'newer perspective'), Paul and Judaism, Paul's view of women in the church, and the rhetorical analysis of Paul's letters. The 'new perspectives' presented here have great potential but should be assessed critically because many scholars have their own agendas.

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Das Buch ist ein nützlicher Aufsatzband zu folgenden Themen: Paulus und die Politik, Paulus und Sponsorenschaft (sowie breit gefächerte wirtschaftliche Anliegen), die Widersacher von Paulus, Paulus und ethnische Belange, Paulus und das Gesetz (aus „jüngerer Perspektive“), Paulus und das Judentum, die paulinische Sicht von Frauen in der Gemeinde sowie rhetorische Analyse der Paulusbrieve. Die „jüngeren Perspektiven“, wie hier dargestellt, haben großes Potential, aber sie sollten kritisch bewertet werden, weil viele Wissenschaftler ihre eigenen Anliegen vertreten.

RÉSUMÉ

Cet ouvrage contient un ensemble d'études utiles sur l'apôtre Paul : son enseignement sur la politique, sur la bienfaisance (et d'autres questions économiques), l'identification de ses adversaires, la question ethnique, son approche de la Loi (avec une perspective encore plus nouvelle que la « nouvelle perspective »), son rapport au judaïsme, son point de vue sur le rôle des femmes dans l'Église, et l'analyse rhétorique de ses lettres. Les « nouvelles perspectives » présentées ici sont grandement prometteuses, mais doivent être évaluées avec un regard critique car de nombreux spécialistes ont leurs objectifs particuliers.

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The present collection provides a representative survey of recent perspectives on the life and letters of Paul. The volume is intended 'to provide the advanced undergraduate, graduate student or interested layperson with an introduction to a wide range of fascinating approaches to Paul that are relevant to, yet go beyond, traditional theological and historical concerns' (1). As such, it supplements the standard textbooks on Paul. The chapters reflect some of the ways in which the study of Paul has, in recent years, been liberated from traditional or conventional perspectives (1). While both, old and new theological perspectives, play a role in all of the essays that make up this work, they do not command the stage.

In 'Paul and the Roman Empire: Recent Perspectives', W. Carter surveys and evaluates the work of the Society of Biblical Literature's *Paul and Politics Group*.