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Revelation and the End of All Things

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exposure and inclusiveness for all. Surely, at least half of his story is her story.

There is much to learn and reflect upon in this publication. The strength of the work is its understandable and lucid writing. At the onset of each unit the author announces what he is going to do, then does it, and then summarizes for the reader what he has done. Porter disambiguates a complex religio-philosophical subject with apt illustration and wit (“One of the Three Great Lies: ‘I’m from the government, and I’m here to help you.’”). The reader comes away better appreciating the differences between pluralism and plurality, anti-Semitism and anti-Judaism, henotheistic, Gnostic, and monotheistic faith, locution, illocution, and perlocution, internal and external history, mimetic, exilic, and historical-covenantal religion. The section on anti-Semitism (8.1; I, 181-210) is very worth reading as well as the discussion on abortion and euthanasia (12.1-4; II, 57-92). As the author appropriates a rich intellectual heritage of prior thinking, the volumes are replete with innumerable insights conducive to teaching and sermonizing. Each of the volumes has a subject and author index. The second volume adds a final bibliography of essential works cited.

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Revelation and the End of All Things

Craig R. Koester

3 Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001

209 pages, \$24.95 Softcover

Perhaps the most controversial and debated text in the New Testament, the book of Revelation, has had a long history of use and misuse. *Revelation and the End of All Things* uses close literary analysis to place Revelation in historical and social context while raising issues relevant to our world. Koester’s goal is to remove two thousand years of theology to look at Revelation in the terms of its time and place of writing. Koester, a professor of New Testament at Luther Seminary in St. Paul, Minnesota, has written similar texts on Hebrews

for the Anchor Bible series and the more general *A Beginner's Guide to Reading the Bible*.

Koester uses the first quarter of the book to detail the history of interpretation of Revelation from early theologians such as Justin Martyr and Irenaeus through the Protestant Reformation and into modern theology. The extensive historical analysis places the images, cities and events mentioned in Revelation within a first-century Christian experience. Political concerns that may have influenced the author and original audience are paralleled with current issues, but without the sensationalism found in some current scholarship. Koester respects the original context while explaining the ways Revelation has been interpreted by groups such as the Jehovah's Witnesses, Seventh Day Adventists and Branch Davidians. He attempts to remove some of the tenuous connections made by dispensationalists to Old Testament passages and specifically addresses the concepts of the rapture and millennium. His primary argument is against mixing literal understanding with metaphor as a method for interpreting the text, arguing that this is often the means of justifying a framework of the apocalypse grounded in political concerns rather than theological authority.

Koester analyzes the text in small groupings of three or four chapters, focusing on each individual chapter for eight to ten pages. He offers a literary analysis that walks the reader through the text's use of metaphor and allegory and notes imagery that resonates in the twenty-first century. The emphasis is on the many issues raised by the text and not merely the most convenient. By encouraging the reading of Revelation as a whole, Koester wants to counter "proof texting", the use of isolated passages, taken out of context, which suit the interpreter more than the source.

The analysis looks at the text in terms of the apocalyptic genre, the sources the author may have drawn upon and, very interestingly, the hymns inspired by images from Revelation. Particular attention is paid to the recurring images of the lamb and the beast, and also the themes of judgment and redemption. The study is more akin to that of poetry than prose and treats the text as a lyrical passage and not a narrative.

Koester's book is a very good introduction to the study of Revelation, having the right mix of background and interpretation. Though much may be familiar territory to one who has studied the text as Koester has, the book will still serve as a valuable reference, particularly for anyone teaching the academic study of Revelation. The book is very

readable for the layperson while raising enough questions to hold the interest of the scholar.

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Mary: Glimpses of the Mother of Jesus

Barbara Roberts Gaventa
Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999
164 pages, \$29.45 Softcover

Mary, the mother of Jesus, generally plays a fairly insignificant role in Protestant expressions of Christianity. Her presence in the canonical gospels is rather sparse, and extracanonical texts about Mary are not widely known in Protestant circles. Enticingly, Gaventa draws our attention to the character of the mother of Jesus in these tidbits of first- and second-century narratives. From a Protestant standpoint, Gaventa endeavours to reveal the multiple pictures of Mary in these texts, not so much historically or theologically, but in a literary sense.

In a respectful and informed manner, Gaventa begins with a brief survey of Catholic and Orthodox perspectives of Mary, along with recent historical quests, liberation theological views and feminist queries concerning the mother of Jesus. Gaventa's own approach is to analyze the characterization of Mary in the New Testament narratives of Matthew, Luke-Acts and John, as well as in the full text of a second-century apocryphal work, the Protoevangelium of James (the text of which she includes in full in an Appendix).

Gaventa studies the biblical texts in their final form, as whole narratives, mentioning but largely avoiding debates about sources. This allows her to develop thorough sketches of Mary in each gospel (except Mark, where Mary is barely mentioned). Though the gospels contain relatively few "glimpses" of the mother of Jesus, Gaventa "teases out" an amazing amount of material regarding the various roles and functions Mary fulfills in each of these separate stories.