

The second issue, therefore, is that developmental approaches like the one Dell advocates cannot help but stop the development in question arbitrarily. There is no good reason given for why – given the developmental ‘progress’ – one should pay attention to anything in the Old Testament, or the New, for that matter, or prior to the Reformation, or before, say, late last week. It is telling, in this regard, that at one point Dell comments on the influence of the ‘more enlightened moral codes’ of ‘secular ethics ... on our modern viewpoint’ (p. 93). I somehow doubt this rather generous opinion of us moderns; I also believe that Christianity, generally, and the New Testament, more specifically, contains all of the problems that are found in the Old Testament and that there is plenty of ‘enlightenment’ to be found in the Old Testament – not just here and there but in its broader, indeed broadest, sweep ... even for us moderns. Dell’s final sentence, then, left me unsatisfied: the Old Testament ‘can be our friend, even if a rather challenging and contrary one at the end of the day’ (p. 220). One hopes, for Christians at least, that the key verb here would have been a stronger one: *must* or *should*. I find myself hoping, therefore, for a second edition of Dell’s volume in which she might press further on not only comprehending but justifying the Old Testament – for sceptics and believers alike.

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## Eve Poole, *Buying God: Consumerism & Theology*

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Of all the moral and theological dilemmas facing the church in the modern world, perhaps no single issue is more all-encompassing than the challenge posed by the seemingly inescapable matrix of consumer culture. Given the pervasiveness of this problem it is not surprising that for several decades the theological guild has seen steady production of works focusing on the dynamics of consumer culture. In *Buying God*, Dr Eve Poole attempts to harvest the rich field of academic work about consumerism and present it in a form that is more accessible to a popular audience, without sacrificing the precision of academic analysis (pp. x, xii).

The practical thrust of the book is perhaps its most unique and welcome contribution to the discussion of consumerism. The final chapter of the book (Chapter 8) invites its reader into a personal examination which Poole calls ‘The Consumption Audit’. Covering areas of personal well-being, time, talents, finances, relationships and the planet, the ‘Consumption Audit’ attempts to assist Christians in interrogating the habits and patterns of life that consumerism inculcates in us (Chapters 5 and 6) and to measure these against true spiritual desire and Christian virtue (Chapters 6 and 7). The end of the book includes other resources for prayer, examination and study that seek to equip individual Christians and congregations to live a prophetic counter-witness to the commodifying trends of consumer culture.

Yet, at times, Poole's practical advice drifts away from confronting the particular realities of consumerism with deep theological insight and veers into the realm of generic self-help. Do you exercise and eat a healthy diet? Not sleeping enough? Try avoiding alcohol and caffeine before bed (p. 111). Not satisfied with your work? Perhaps try taking up a hobby (p. 114). Are you showing enough love to the people who are important to you (p. 121)? The problem here is not merely one of tone or a shift in subject matter. Rather it points to one of the most vexing challenges in seeking to counter consumerism with religious practice.

In offering up theology or religious practice as an antidote to the meaninglessness of constructing one's self-identity through consumption, one runs the risk of subjecting the claims of a religious tradition itself to the logic of consumer identity construction. If one makes self-fulfilment, 'meaning' or 'purpose' the express reason for engaging in a religious tradition – say one decides to volunteer more or attend worship more because a study has shown that such activities correlate with overall well-being (p. 112) – one undercuts the very thing that makes such practices effective antidotes to consumerism in the first place, namely promoting 'the pursuit of intrinsic values' (p. 100). In offering religious practice as 'helper-in-chief' in constructing meaning (p. 98), Poole risks an intervention that simply plays by the rules of consumer brand marketing. Christianity, as it turns out, might just be a better, more fulfilling brand.

Poole is of course not unaware of this problem and her discussion of virtue and character formation (pp. 101–9) provides some mitigation of this persistent challenge. Still, the presence of this problem points to another more perplexing difficulty with the book. Fully half of the book is devoted to an extended 'clearing of the throat' (p. 66) that takes up the question of theological method. The section is riddled with problems, containing a variety of infelicitous groupings and comparisons. For example, Poole at times attempts to group together discussions of method which take up considerations of audience and rhetorical purpose (Tracy's 'publics' and Williams' '3Cs'), overall styles or approaches to theology (Lindbeck's typology and Frei's 'philosophy/grammar' continuum) and distinctive moments within theological reflection (Frei's first, second and third order theology). This attempt to place disparate kinds of conversations about theological method onto a single map creates several inaccurate groupings, such as attempting to map Lindbeck's 'experiential-expressivist', 'cognitive-propositional' and 'cultural-linguistic' types of theology onto Frei's first, second and third order aspects of theology (p. 45). In fact, each of Lindbeck's types of theology would still have first, second, and third order aspects.

More to the point, however, most of the conversation on method seems immaterial to the proffered purpose of the book. The payoff of the section, the identification of a style of theological approach called 'Social Liturgy', is left largely undeveloped and referenced in passing only twice in the meat of Poole's analysis of consumerism. One wishes Poole had devoted more time to developing this very promising concept to demonstrate the commitments of Christian practitioners to non-utilitarian, intrinsic goods and the interpersonal solidarity that arises from such commitments. Absent a persistent focus on social liturgy, the two halves of the book lack internal coherence. Furthermore, absent this focus, Poole's much needed and promising turn to the everyday experience of Christian practitioners loses much of its potential force.

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