

is wanting. What is a 'generic name'? Does Seitz know that Elohim is 'used throughout the world' and has equivalents in other Semitic languages (p. 105) from the testimony of the Old Testament itself, and if so, where? Also, is Elohim always 'generic' in the Old Testament? Albert de Pury has recently argued that it functions at times as a proper name.

The third section of the book, 'Theological Readings in the Elder Testament', takes up several literary phenomena in the Old Testament that have exerted a historic influence on the church's deliberations about the Trinity: 'colloquies [or conversations among divine persons] in the Psalms, divine agency in creation (Genesis, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes)', speech about the Son in Hebrews and Old Testament theophanies (p. 261). Seitz seeks to demonstrate that these historically 'elder' testimonies still carry an 'extensional sense': because of God's self-consistency, they speak in their own integrity to God's triune self. Here the book comes closest to thinking biblical discourse and theology ontology together, including and especially in view of christology, yet the overall effect remains impressionistic.

Seitz has written a stimulating and substantial work that advances the project of interpreting scripture canonically. In spite of this service, *Elder Testament* also shows some critical unclarity: theologically, in relating considerations of literary association with theological reference; and editorially, in its shape and its pitch. Besides answering to multiple, noncontiguous purposes, the prose of *Elder Testament* is cumbersome, and typographical errors litter its pages.

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**Katharine Dell, *Who Needs the Old Testament? Its Enduring Appeal and Why the New Atheists Don't Get It* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2017), pp. x + 257, \$34.00.**

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In this concise volume, a leading authority on biblical wisdom has written a wide-ranging book that is – as the subtitle reveals – particularly animated by critiques by New Atheists like Richard Dawkins and Christopher Hitchens. Dell, who teaches Old Testament at Cambridge, is understandably disturbed by these challenges, and, noting a dearth of responses from within the field of biblical studies, offers her own here. Part 1, 'Breaking the New Atheist Spell' (a nod to the work of another New Atheist, Daniel Dennett), engages such criticisms directly, with the second part, 'Engaging with the Old Testament', offering alternative texts that tell a different story. This second part is meant to evoke the 'enduring appeal' of the Old Testament that is also mentioned in the book's subtitle.

Dell's writing is both clear and accessible. Endnotes are few and often refer to her own work since she has covered much background on the texts under discussion in her many prior publications. The volume as a whole, therefore, seems designed for a

wide readership – a book club, perhaps, or study group of Christians who are struggling with certain aspects of the Old Testament, especially in the wake of New Atheist critique.

I wrote a book of my own that shares some themes with Dell's and that appeared just a few months before hers (*The Old Testament is Dying: A Diagnosis and Recommended Treatment*). The overlap on matters like Marcionism and the New Atheists was gratifying to see, though differences remain. To be specific, I worry that Dell's approach does not, in the end, help the New Atheists 'get it', and, as a result, may also fail to help her Christian readers 'get' the Old Testament either. Two issues are particularly worrisome in my judgement.

The first is that Dell concedes too much to the New Atheists. Key to Dawkins' critique is that Christians 'pick and choose' among texts and so they unfairly – or, better, unjustifiably – sanitize scripture. He sets out to 'un-sanitize' it, so to speak, by highlighting the mean and nasty parts. Rather than offer a robust canonical countermeasure, however, Dell seems content to agree with Dawkins, repeatedly affirming that picking and choosing some biblical texts over others is inescapable, even 'inevitable' (p. 37; see also, for example, pp. 33, 38, 58, 96, 98, 114, 115, 162, 190, 213). Dell then moves to consider other, presumably 'better' parts of the Old Testament to balance Dawkins' selections. But it is hard not to imagine Dawkins being perfectly satisfied at this point because it proves his argument. Dell is no doubt correct when she notes that, if Dawkins had started with, say, the prophets, he might have ended up with a more positive moral picture from the Old Testament (though even here Dell is forced to qualify matters, p. 146). But Dawkins did *not* start with the prophets and his ultimate point is not that there are no 'less negative' passages whatsoever (Hitchens, at least, admits of a few), but that there are so many terrible passages, and that Christians skirt the latter entirely by focusing only on the former. So, again, Dell's approach does not seem to meet the New Atheist critique but rather to reinforce it. We get little to no help in understanding why the better passages should be selected or how they function vis-à-vis the others.

And what about those terrible passages? Here too one fears that Dell's well-intentioned volume will not fully satisfy those worried about the Old Testament, whether they stand inside or outside the faith. Her ultimate explanation for difficult passages is to appeal to historical development, progressive revelation and/or historical contextualization (see, for example, pp. 11–12, 24, 33–5, 65, 115, 186). As she says at one point: 'It [Deut 23:1] does sound demented to our modern ears' – here she is concurring with Hitchens – 'and there is no condoning it. I seek merely to understand the context in which it was said in order to comprehend it, not to justify it' (pp. 92–3; cf. similarly p. 109). Admissions like this one (and they are found throughout the book) grant extensive ground to the New Atheists who would likely reply that such comprehension, in their opinion at any rate, is simply not to be had – or that it just doesn't mean very much relative to 'modern sensibilities'. Dell concedes as much herself, though what these modern sensibilities are, where they come from and if they are uniform (let alone correct) is never discussed. In any event, the Old Testament can't help but come off looking pre-modern, primitive and pre-Christian (cf. pp. 9, 41, 65, 90, 92, 93, 185) – ultimately, just 'confined and local' (p. 38). According to Dell, 'an interest in the "local" is hardly a crime' (p. 191; cf. p. 38), which is true, but hardly the most compelling response one might imagine. Here then, as at other points, readers will not find a true *apologia*, in the classical sense, for the Old Testament in Dell's book, and the New Atheists, at the very least, will likely be unconvinced. I worry that Christian readers, too – particularly those that lack Dell's own expertise – might share the same opinion.

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*

(London: SCM, 2018), pp. xviii + 174. £16.99.

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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.