



## Protestant Theological University

### Review of: John Kaltner, *Reading the Old Testament Anew*

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of the Kirta legend is thorough and quite creative but also quite speculative, as the author appears to realise. Contrary to most other scholars, van den Bosch assumes that King Kirta fulfilled his vow to Athiratu, which implied that he would give the goddess a large amount of silver and gold if he would acquire Hariya as his bride (KTU 1.14:IV). According to van den Bosch's unusual interpretation, Athiratu did not know that the vow had been fulfilled or was dissatisfied with the fulfilment. Following the birth of his children, she punished Kirta by making him ill. After Ilu had arranged Kirta's healing, Athiratu possibly incited Kirta's first-born son Yaššibu, whom she had suckled, to revolt against his father. In the ritual texts that refer to Athiratu, her sacrifices are mentioned before the sacrifices to the other goddesses but immediately after the sacrifices to the highest male gods, which demonstrates her relatively high position and, according to van den Bosch, her wisdom. At the end of the book, van den Bosch rightly concludes that the Ugaritic texts regard maternity as an essential characteristic of Athiratu. His conclusion that wisdom was also part of her 'anthropomorphic core' remains unsubstantiated, just like the idea that the Kirta legend marks a new stage in the marginalisation of Athiratu. A proper analysis of Athiratu's role in the Baal myth (esp. KTU 1.4:I-V and 1.6:I) would have yielded different conclusions, namely that Ilu and Athiratu enjoyed a good relationship, that Athiratu was fond of golden and silver presents, and that she was unwise when she suggested to appoint Athtaru as Baal's successor. In my view, Athiratu's relationship with Ilu may have made it attractive for Israelites to accept Asherah as a high deity, next to her husband El/ʾHWH; cf. the texts from Kuntillet Ajrud, which refer to 'ʾHWH and his Asherah'.

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## **Biblical Studies**

John Kaltner, *Reading the Old Testament Anew: Biblical Perspectives on Today's Issues* (Winona: Anselm Academic, 2017), ISBN 9781599827742; 284 pp., \$ 29.95.

In *Reading the Old Testament Anew*, John Kaltner provides a thematic introduction to the Hebrew Bible. Rather than writing a comprehensive introductory work, Kaltner concentrates on six themes in the Old Testament: Creation; Covenant; Liberation; the Human Condition; the Other; and

Social Justice. The first chapter offers a succinct but up-to-date introduction to the Old Testament. Kaltner explains that his selection of themes reflects 'the book's intended purpose as a classroom resource for courses in religion or theology that have a biblical component in them' (8). Each theme is discussed under three headings: First Impressions (which identifies and briefly introduces the most important Old Testament passages pertaining to the theme); Second Opinions (where Kaltner sketches debates in Biblical Studies on the selected themes); and Implications and Applications (which offers questions for further thinking and reflection). Moreover, each chapter contains a section that treats the reception of these themes in art and literature. The chapter on covenant can serve as an example of Kaltner's approach: after briefly introducing Gen 6-9; Gen 15, 17; Exod; Deut; and 'covenant elsewhere in the Old Testament' in the first section of the chapter, Kaltner moves on to discuss issues of Pentateuchal source criticism, the role of covenant thinking in prophetic works, and the link between covenants in the Hebrew Bible and ancient Near Eastern treatises in the second part. The Implications and Applications section offers questions such as: How has your understanding of the Bible changed after reading this chapter? or: Do you think the relationship between God and humanity as it is presented in the Old Testament is primarily healthy and positive? This shows that for Kaltner both exegetical and biblical-theological issues are of importance when reflecting on the Old Testament/Hebrew Bible. Throughout the book Kaltner's writing is careful and nuanced. Yet the book explicitly addresses an audience with no prior knowledge of Biblical literature and, as a result, engagement with the Hebrew text of the Old Testament is absent from Kaltner's work. This would make the book somewhat harder to use in a context where general Introduction to Bible courses of the American type are not common, but I think *Reading the Old Testament Anew* can still fulfil a useful purpose as a resource in, for instance, an undergraduate Biblical Theology course. There, its thematic approach (which is still predominant in Biblical Theology, but has also been challenged on various grounds) would prove helpful, not only for how it collects the material, but also for stimulating debates on the losses and gains that come with thematic approaches. To sum up: Kaltner has written an engaging book, which is refreshing in how it opens up the Old Testament to students with no prior knowledge of it.

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