

The Invention of God. By Thomas Römer. Translated from the French by Raymond Geuss. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 2015. Pp. xii + 303. \$35.

Römer's claim is that Israel "invented" God. R. describes this invention as a centuries-long process of small, innovative steps that turned a desert-war deity into the God known today as universal, singular, and transcendent. God did not always have these characteristics. He began as *Yhw*, a deified mountain in the northwest Arabian desert. His original worshippers were Semitic nomads known variously as Midianites or Shasu. Only later did Israel, an El-worshipping polity of the southern Levant, adopt him as its national deity. For centuries after this adoption, El remained Israel's chief deity, and Yhwh his son. The temple in Jerusalem was not originally Yhwh's shrine, and even after his enthronement there; the worship of other deities continued in its precincts. This temple, and possibly its successor, also contained his statue. Yhwh had a consort, Asherah, the "Queen of Heaven," whose worship was unproblematic and widespread into the exilic period. Pressure from imperialist powers led to innovations that included the valorization of Jerusalem, the removal of non-Yahwistic worship there, and the establishment of an Assyrian-style "treaty" with Yhwh. After 598 BCE, exiled Judahites claimed to find Yhwh at work on their behalf even in Babylon, without the mediating realities of king and country. Thus a minor deity had developed into a God of universal, sovereign power.

R., a professor of Hebrew Bible at the Collège de France, received a rigorous philological and literary training at Heidelberg under R. Rendtorff. His research has focused on the relationships among the patriarchal, Mosaic, and royal blocks of historical narrative in the Hebrew Bible. Lengthy study of these narrative blocks provides him with abundant philological and archaeological sources for this book.

R. discusses all the topics one expects in a good history of Israelite religion, including the meaning of Yhwh's name, his geographical origins, his "covenantal" adoption by Israel, and the development of the Jerusalem cult. R.'s lifelong work with historical texts makes him especially sensitive to redaction-critical evidence. His careful reading of the Deuteronomistic History, for example, reveals that the contest between Yhwh and Ba'al (1 Kgs 16–19) contains kernels of memory from a time when Yhwh himself was addressed as *ba'al* ("master") and was just one of several *ba'als* in Israel. Yhwh became God of Israel by outlasting his main competitor, the Phoenician *ba'al*, Melqart. Supplementing his discussion with the latest epigraphic and archaeological data, R. develops a very clear narrative that explains both the original intercultic conflict and its reworking by later ideological historians.

R. is not shy of controversy. For example, he argues that the Jerusalem temple was originally dedicated to the sun god Shamash and only later became Yhwh's shrine. For evidence, he relies on solar imagery in the Bible, but such imagery is rare and appears mostly in texts too late to support R.'s thesis. A biblical passage that R. presents as evidence actually comes from a reconstructed *Vorlage* to the LXX (3 Kgdms 8:53). It is so hopelessly corrupt that even R. admits "it is questionable whether the translator understood correctly what he was translating" (98). This does not inhibit R. from concluding, "the house that Solomon built—that is, renovated—was first of all a house for

Shamash” (99). Some of R.’s other arguments show the same problems. The evidence for the presence of an image of Yhwh in Solomon’s temple is thin. The identity of Yhwh’s consort as Asherah and her depiction in Judean pillar figurines is equivocal and hotly debated. R. argues in favor of both propositions, but on the support of such meager data, R.’s assertions do not quite persuade.

This book is a translation of the original French *L’Invention de Dieu*. Raymond Geuss’s lucid translation only fails with technical terms and proper names, which appear in their French form. This is usually only distracting. For example, baetyl is *betyle* (92, 142–43); Uzziah is *Ozias* (134) and *Osius* (150); the Egyptian historian is named Manetho and Manethon on the same page (234). This failure causes real problems once, however, when the similarity between the French spelling of Hezekiah (*Ézéchias*) and Ezekiel (*Ézéchiel*) leads to a mention of the reforming kings Ezekiel and Josiah (125).

Despite these minor flaws, this work is a superb addition to the study of ancient Israelite religion. R. amply illustrates the slow process by which a warrior deity of the Arabian desert became the transcendent and universal deity of biblical monotheism. It rightly deserves a place in the classrooms and libraries of anyone interested in the development of the Abrahamic faiths.

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The Story of Monasticism: Retrieving an Ancient Tradition for Contemporary Spirituality. By Greg Peters. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2015. Pp. ix-278; \$15.37.

Greg Peters has written a work of history and apologetics that aims to contribute to ecclesial renewal and ecumenical dialogue. While this may seem overambitious for a book of 278 pages, P. generally accomplishes its admirable goals.

As a work of history, this volume traces the development of monasticism from the ancient world to contemporary movements. Its definition of monasticism is very broad: “monasticism refers to those who intentionally live alone or in a community under a rule of life and vows that give shape to their daily routine and shared mission in life” (4). Thus P.’s history embraces not only the ascetics of the ancient church and the rise of influential communities (Benedictines, Cistercians, Carthusians, etc.), but also religious congregations not normally classified as monastic, such as the Franciscans and the Jesuits. This blurring of the traditional definitions may give historians reason to frown, but what P. really desires is to chronicle the history of those living Christianity in an intentional and countercultural way. In his telling, each community or movement contributes an important charism to the entire church for an evermore authentic witness to Christ. His rapid overview of this story, while not breaking new ground and lacking a full engagement with contemporary criticism, does provide a concise introduction to some of the major movements in both Eastern and Western Christianity.