

the already-familiar series. Translated and somewhat simplified from the German *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Alten Testament*, this volume provides an analysis of etymology, occurrences, and usage of words in the Hebrew Bible. While there is yet no index, the table of contents provides a list of the Hebrew words considered—both in Hebrew characters and transliteration—together with their English translations. The emphasis is on meaning, from the narrow sense, building to the theologically significant concepts represented by the word.

We can only hope that the rest of the volumes will soon be available to biblical scholars whose language abilities do not include German.

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Braswell, George W., Jr. *Islam: Its Prophet, Peoples, Politics and Power*. Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1996. 338 pp. \$24.99.

Given the enmity that characterizes much of the interaction between Islam and Christianity, is it possible for a non-Muslim from a Protestant Christian tradition to write an unbiased account of Islam? Despite the difficulties, George Braswell, Jr., professor of Islam and friend of Muslims for over thirty years, does an adequate job. If he has biases, they show only in the easy adoption and use of non-Islamic language and terms to describe Islam itself. In important ways, one religion cannot be described with the language and terms of another religion. If Braswell has an agenda, it is simply the hope of dispelling the ignorance toward Islam and Muslims so inflamed by the horrendous stereotypical presentation of Muslims by the western media.

Apart from all that lies between, the first and last chapters may be the most important in this text. The author sets Islam as a religion and civilization in context and asks a series of questions attempting to get at the core of the challenges facing those of us in the West as we are confronted by Islam and its mission. In his summary he gives brief yet helpful responses to these core questions. Marshall Hodgson, author of the most authoritative history of Islam written in the West, took three volumes in his *Venture of Islam* to cover what Braswell does in this short text. Braswell's coverage of topics is expansive but the lack of depth and careful analysis is obvious.

Often the most telling topic for non-Muslim experts of Islam is their treatment of the Prophet. While Braswell treats the Prophet with respect, he often paints a picture of Muhammad as choreographer rather than prophet. Braswell speaks of Muhammad "changing his mind" (14), launching "his prophetic mission" (13), and forming a new religion. Rather, one would do well to note that Muhammad had no initial desire to form a new religion, nor to launch his own mission. Like so many other prophets, he reluctantly took on the mantle.

Perhaps Braswell's perspective on Islam as more of a sociopolitical movement of history than a revelation of God to the Arab peoples is simply part and parcel of the non-Muslim perspective. Most of his sources are non-Muslim students who approach the religion in this same manner. Although he refers to primary authors, it appears that he has learned of their material through prior non-Muslim scholars.

One strength of the text is breadth of coverage, which includes Islamic

theology and praxis, normative institutions and sectarian movements, morals and manners, Muslim response to current issues, global and American Islam, and a brief look at the Islamic/Christian encounter. For American readers the section on Muslims in America is particularly important. Braswell's attention to this topic is approximately three times the length given to Muhammad. Here he notes the immigration and growth of "orthodox" Islam in America and compares and contrasts this with the Nation of Islam currently led by Louis Farrakhan. Although it is somewhat problematic to use the term "orthodox" in an effort to describe a certain sort of Islam, Braswell is cognizant of this. He delineates between the Sunni and Shi'a branches, as well as the divisions within these (in another chapter).

One particular point of contention with Braswell's treatment of the pillars of Islam is that he consistently refers to "six" pillars. In an effort to simplify the understanding of the religion of Islam, respondents often refer to five pillars or fundamental concepts for the religion. These five are: *shahada*, or confession of God and his prophet Muhammad; *salat*, or prayer; *zakat*, or the giving of alms; *sawm*, or fasting in the month of Ramadan; *hajj*, or performance of the pilgrimage to Mecca once in a lifetime. Some consider a sixth pillar to be that of *jihad*, or holy war. But while this concept is applicable both to individuals and to the community as a whole, it is not universally obligatory in the same sense as the other five are. When asked, Muhammad himself is reported to have said that *jihad* is voluntary. Given the current stereotypes of crazed, fundamentalist Muslims acting as terrorists in the cause of their holy wars, it is not helpful to include this concept as a fundamental pillar of Islam. In Braswell's effort to dispel such stereotypes he would do well to drop this insistence on including *jihad* as a sixth pillar.

This text is respectful and would be adequate for a cursory introduction to Islam. It does help dispel western ignorance toward Muslims and their religion and civilization. For the student of Islam, however, its broad sweep and lack of in-depth analysis will bring frustration.

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Carson, D. A. *The Gagging of God: Christianity Confronts Pluralism*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996. 640 pp. \$19.99.

Donald A. Carson is research professor of NT at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Deerfield, Illinois. He is the author and editor of numerous books which range across New Testament language and interpretation, historical theology, and systematic theology. *The Gagging of God* appears as Carson's personal response to some of the issues already raised in *God and Culture: Essays in Honor of Carl F. H. Henry* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), edited by himself and John D. Woodbridge.

In his introductory chapter, Carson opens his discussion of contemporary pluralism by describing the three phenomena to which the term may refer. The first, empirical pluralism, sums up a growing diversity in every area of life, especially in Western countries. The second, cherished pluralism, is the stance that