

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

such variety is to be viewed as valuable. The third, philosophical or hermeneutical pluralism, is the outlook that no ideological or religious claim is necessarily right or wrong. This perspective, which Carson considers "by far, the most serious development" (19), is the primary subject of the book.

According to Carson the relativistic framework of the postmodern era has some positives, even from an evangelical perspective. For instance, it reminds us of the part culture plays in the shaping of our beliefs and calls into question the finality of human reason (96-97). Yet, at the same time, Carson appears to rue the fact that Christianity (and especially evangelicalism) will have to engage such an insidious foe (102-136). One wonders if evangelicals have not become so used to operating within modernity that culture shock is occurring with the turn to postmodernity.

In the second of the book's four parts, Carson locks horns with such self-confessed religious pluralists as John Hick, Paul Knitter, and Schubert Ogden. But he is even more concerned with what he perceives to be a creeping relativism and/or inclusivism among his evangelical colleagues, John E. Sanders and Clark H. Pinnock. While I personally believe that Pinnock, for instance, weakens his position with his belief in the *possibility* of postmortem evangelism for those who have not had the opportunity to accept Jesus Christ in this life, Carson's own case seems to be based in Calvinian presuppositions of limited access to salvation. For example, is it not a case of special pleading to imply that the narrow door of Matthew 7:14 "suggests restricted access" (300) when the whole of the chapter refers to human choices rather than to divine predestination?

In the third (and shortest) section of the book, Carson attempts to provide the outlines of an evangelical response to issues such as government, religious freedom, law and judiciary, education, economics, and ethics and morals. Here, Carson offers what, in my view, is a carefully nuanced, common-sense, holistic Christian approach to public policy. He refuses to choose between H. Richard Niebuhr's fivefold typology of Christian responses to culture, and instead insists that Christian thought is ultimately eschatological. This means that "Christian mission can never be reduced to preparing people for this life" (434). Hence, "There is a primacy to preparing people to meet God which, though its horizon is eternity, will also change how people live here and now" (435). I agree! Still, maybe our postmodern society demands today, more than ever before, that biblical "truth" be lived out rather than merely talked out.

In the final part of the book Carson looks at how pluralism has infiltrated the ranks of evangelicalism. He worries that some evangelicals have become so postmodern that they can no longer truly be called "evangelical" (460). One can only agree that the "selfism" of the broader culture is mirrored in the church in such movements as "the prosperity gospel" (465), but I have to ask whether Carson has not taken too much of an either/or position in regard to the effectiveness of psychotherapy and the "emotional release" provided by the cross. A more holistic perspective is to be had in Archibald D. Hart, *Me, Myself, and I: How Far Should We Go in Our Search for Self-Fulfillment?* (Ann Arbor, MI: Servant Publications, 1992) or in Richard J. Mouw's all-too-brief, *Consulting the Faithful: What Christian Intellectuals Can Learn from Popular Religion* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994).

However, this is a minor issue compared with what Carson offers as his "test case" in the doctrine of final punishment (516). It is in this area, he believes, that evangelicalism reflects "greater diversity, greater pluralism if you will, than anything the movement experienced half a century ago" (443). Carson fairly states the conditionalist position, and attempts to counter it with word studies and exegesis. One might complain, though, that his exegesis of passages such as Mark 9:47-48 is overly literalistic and wooden. While examining the words of some of the relevant passages, Carson does not take adequate cognizance of the powerful NT resurrection theme. In fact, "resurrection" does not even occur in the book's comprehensive index. Exegesis cannot afford to ignore the bigger picture provided by systematic theology. His argument is at its weakest when he attempts to explain why hell's punishment is eternal: "What is hard to prove, but seems to me probable, is that one reason why the conscious punishment of hell is ongoing is because sin is ongoing" (533). This line of reasoning appears to be more consistent with cosmic dualism than with biblical soteriology and eschatology. Still, as one who disagrees with Carson on this issue, I share his concern that evangelicalism may lose its emphasis on the possibility of humans being finally lost. Ironically, however, the traditional doctrine of hell has possibly done more to promote universalism than any other single factor.

*The Gagging of God* is designed to introduce the reader to the hermeneutical pitfalls of our age by attempting to steer a course between the excesses of propositional and metaphorical theology alike (190). It also offers some thoughtful strategies for evangelization of the postmodern generations (511-514). Yet, *The Gagging of God* does not appear to be distinguished by great optimism that this mission is possible. Would the Christians of the apostolic age have accomplished what they did if their perceptions of the dangers of their age outshone their sense of the possibilities opened to them by the Holy Spirit? In the end, I could not escape the feeling that this vigorously written, well-documented book was intended also to "gag" some of Carson's fellow-evangelicals who have turned away from the Calvinism which previously so dominated the movement.

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Currid, John D. *Ancient Egypt and the Old Testament*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1997. 269 pp. Paper, \$21.99.

John D. Currid's *Ancient Egypt and the Old Testament* is a triumph in the area of comparative research between Egypt and the OT. The book undertakes an examination of a much-forgotten subject and justly treats the relevant evidence in order to illustrate the connections and differences between the two ancient cultures as well as looking to Egyptian sources for illumination on OT books and stories.

In Part I, Currid initiates his investigation of the relationship between Egyptian and Hebrew cultures with an "Introduction" into the state of research on the subject and reasons for its unfortunate neglect in the scholarly world. In addition to pointing out this neglect, Currid also tangles with the question of