

which both Moses (believed by some to be the magician *par eminence*) and Michael, the angel, feature rather prominently in their supposed power to protect fearful folk from the darker side of fate.

When it comes to the Colossian philosophy itself, Arnold shows correctly that that philosophy was itself a syncretistic amalgam of Jewish, local, and Christian elements; and that Paul's high Christology is part and parcel of his concerted attempt to come to the rescue of those Colossian Christians who had fallen prey to a faith-eroding folk philosophy that stressed, among other things, the right performance of certain dietary and days-observing rites.

Not only is Arnold's book a pleasure to read in terms of the tone of the text, the scope of the study or the coherence of his case, but his book is also typographically pleasing to the eye as well. Mine caught only three little slips: on two occasions, the dittographical duplication of the definite article (235 and 237, the first paragraph in each case) and, philsofpy, in lieu of, philosophy (243, line one of Conclusion).

Writing in an African context where "syncretism" is discussed as an ever-present phenomenon (not just among the Mayans of Mexico whom Arnold mentions *en passant* [234f]), this reviewer would be remiss if nothing were said, in closing, about the whole issue of "syncretism" itself. Query: is syncretism, i.e., the meeting and merging of elements of both old and new religious worldviews, totally avoidable—whether in Africa, Asia, the world of the West or within the New Testament itself? With recent studies stressing the Jewishness of both Jesus the Christ, and Paul, the Christian, perhaps the old hermeneutical and homiletical tendency to define and defend *metanoia* as the total abnegation of the old and the whole-hearted embracing of the new should be abandoned.

Conversion, in any meaningful sense, perhaps should be likened more to the incomplete metamorphosis of the *Periplaneta americana*, the cockroach, than to the complete metamorphosis of the butterfly. In my view, the Colossians were not unique in their attempt to incorporate the old into the new (or is it the other way round?). To varying degrees, Christians in East, West, North, and South, have done, and continue to do so. Furthermore, it is questionable whether the mixing of superstitious and Christian elements should be limited to the level of the common folk as Arnold's study suggests. Elites are not entirely immune to this tendency, in my opinion. The Colossians themselves however, veered off course when their meeting and merging of old and new eventuated in the undermining of the supremacy of the all-sufficient Christ. And it is that type of syncretism from a Christian perspective that is to be considered intolerable—then and now.

Again, Arnold's book makes a good read and is highly recommended.

United Bible Societies
South Africa

GOSNELL L.O.R. YORKE

Botterweck, Johannes, Helmer Ringgren, and Heinz-Josef Fabry, eds. *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*. Vol. 8. Translated by Douglas W. Stott. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997. 584 pp. \$45.00.

Volume 8 of the *TDOT*, from *lakad* to *mōr*, comes as a welcome addition to

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.

Andrews University

NANCY J. VYHMEISTER

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