

firmament or sky, has not been clearly understood by many. However, Younker and Davidson suggest that the term simply means expanse or sky, similar to how we understand what the sky is today.

As mentioned, the book covered many topics relating to the creation debate, but, for me, it could have included a few more topics. One topic to add would be a study of creation in the book of Job. Many scholars (see, e.g., Ronald Osborn's *Death Before the Fall*) think that Job has much to say about creation. A chapter on this would have been helpful.

This book is a great resource for anyone who wants to know more about what the Bible says in regard to creation. The chapters are well written and easy to follow and understand. The writers present a solid case for a literal interpretation of Gen 1 and 2 in Old Testament theology. They support their positions well. Many people resort to attacking those with whom they do not agree, but the authors of this volume eschew such tactics, and I greatly appreciate this. Background knowledge of the various topics is helpful, but not absolutely necessary, making *The Genesis Creation Account* accessible to the well-informed lay reader. This is a book that should be in one's library. For a detailed discussion of these topics, another book would be a better choice, but for an overview of how Genesis fits into Old Testament theology, *The Genesis Creation Account* is a must read.

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LaCocque, André. *Jesus the Central Jew: His Times and His People*. ECL 15. Atlanta, GA: SBL Press, 2015, 350 pp. Hardcover, US\$57.95; Softcover, US\$42.95.

My friend André LaCocque has surprised us with a new book, which will inform, enrich, deepen, sometimes shock, and paradoxically draw us closer to our Master and Lord Jesus. Indeed, LaCocque portrays a "human" Jesus who may betray anxiety and uncertainty (195), a Jesus we can relate with, and who is not a far and crushing superhuman Being (277). LaCocque's ambition in this book is to demythologize the Jesus of Christian tradition in order to reveal the Jesus who was "central" to his people and not "marginal," a hint in passing to John Meier's massive trilogy. LaCocque warns, however, that his study is not intended to be a polemic regarding Meier's work (2), which he often refers to and gratefully uses. Although LaCocque does not dismiss the sharp scalpel of the critical methods, he respectfully remains "conservative in dealing with the Gospel text" (5).

LaCocque chose to focus on the Synoptic Gospels, rather than on other New Testament books which, according to LaCocque, introduce "vertical" speculations promoting a super Jesus Christ that is beyond the historical domain (13). Cogently, he digs into the immense funds of Jewish tradition, referring either to rabbinic sources to shed light on the event in view, or even to later literary inspirations ("at the risk of being anachronistic") to trace the hidden and living genius of the testimony. The result is a "historical Jesus"

whose vocation was to be, as Martin Buber put it, “the appointed human center’ of the kingdom of God” (10).

The book moves “step by step” into the life of Jesus, from the moment he confronts his compatriots’ messianic expectations (chs. 2–4) to the time of his death and resurrection (chs. 12–14). LaCocque explores all the facets of the personality of Jesus with minutiae and rigor, but also with creativity and literary sensitivity: the Jesus as healer (ch. 4), the Jesus as second Moses and “prophet” (189) who fulfils the Torah (chs. 5–6), the Jesus who “shares flesh and blood with his people” (5; ch. 7); and yet the Jesus who transcends his time and struggles with his self-consciousness (chs. 8, 11). The book is punctuated with discussions on the challenging otherness of Jesus; the stories of his birth, which, according to LaCocque, were not intended to be taken literally (ch. 9), the paradox of his baptism of repentance (ch. 10), and the unusual authority of his teaching, which is rooted in himself rather than in traditional sources (21). Significantly, two chapters are set apart to discuss the meaning of Jesus’ statements *ego eimi* “I am,” and the last cry of Jesus on the cross *’eli ’eli lamah shabaqtani* “My God, my God why have you forsaken me?” In both cases, LaCocque suggests that Jesus may have pronounced the name of *YHWH*, the forbidden name of God (239, 249), with whom he mysteriously identifies.

The book does not purport to develop a specific theological thesis about Jesus, but to expose us to the living person of Jesus in his complexity. The ambiguous lessons that are often drawn may disturb some, but at the same time, through that very frustration, they may do justice to the real Jesus. The book contains many precious gems and insightful remarks, along with a mine of information that testifies to Jesus’s proximity to the Jewish people. Jesus, like the rabbis, argues on the basis of the *qal wahomer* “a fortiori” (Luke 13:5; 14:5; see [21]). LaCocque refers to intriguing parallels with other charismatic figures, miracle-workers, and rabbis of that time who may have been influenced by Jesus; for instance, Honi the circle-maker who, like Jesus, pronounced the Tetragrammaton and is the only one besides Jesus to have called God by the intimate name Abba “Father” (22).

In LaCocque’s enquiry into Jewish tradition, from the Qumran texts and the early rabbinic writings to the later mystical Kabbalah, the same contradictory and paradoxical picture is delineated: humble, prophet, priest, theurgist, reformer, and even divine Creator and Redeemer (26). The way Jesus observes and interprets the Law which, has often been taken as an attack against the Jewish traditional way, is, in fact, “a strictly conservative voice” (151). Even what may appear as a transgression of the Law hides, in fact, a better observance, a principle that resonates in Talmudic wisdom: “The transgression of a precept for serving God is more important than to fulfill it without the same intent” (Naz 23b; see [157]). Likewise, Jesus’s lesson about the Sabbath, which has been given to man and not man to the Sabbath, is echoed in rabbinic tradition (Yoma 85b).

The discussion on the reason why Jesus spoke in parables is particularly illuminating and original. For LaCocque, this is not just a pedagogical method

to convey a difficult message in a simple and entertaining language. This is essentially a way of engaging the listener in the process of interpretation. The parables, which belong to the *bagadah* genre, are dialogal rather than dogmatic, as is the *halakha* genre; they represent a dynamic revelation rather than a vertical and final word. The listener, as well as the speaker, share the same journey in the seeking of truth. For LaCocque, “There is no Jesus in history in isolation from his interpreters. The historical Jesus is the Jesus interpreted, the Jesus seen by Peter, by the Twelve, by the female followers, then by Matthew, Mark, Luke and John” (177).

One of the main lessons LaCocque draws from this enquiry on the historical Jesus is the failure of the Church to have preserved her Jewish roots, preferring a dogmatic, narrow and “solidified” Jesus rather than the broad and dynamic picture of the Jesus of the Hagaddah (177). According to LaCocque, the birth stories of Jesus were not meant to be taken literally (Greek approach), but they should have been understood in a midrashic sense, to make better room for the hidden face of the Messiah, which paradoxically reveals his “real nature.” An example of this paradox is when Jesus urges his disciples to keep the secrecy of his messiahship while he sends them to proclaim the gospel to all Israel (204). Another typical illustration of LaCocque’s approach is his treatment of the tension (or the “pendulum”) between the particular individual and the collective. While Christians have usually focused on the individual, LaCocque, drawing from the Maharal of Prague, reminds of the importance of the corporate view of messiahship or redemption (204–205).

On the tragic figure of Judas, whose name means “the Jew,” LaCocque sadly notes the way traditional Christianity has exploited this figure to fuel the anti-Semitic propaganda and thus contributed to “marginalize” Jesus from his people (213). LaCocque questions the authenticity of the story and suggests a reconstruction on the basis of what he thinks is a Midrash of Zech 11. According to LaCocque, Judas was a Zealot who had good intentions, but things got out of hand.

LaCocque examines the account of the crucifixion, in which he detects many ambiguities, including the one that concerns Jesus’s guilt between the Romans and the Jews: “The crowd wants him to die because he is not a Zealot, and the Romans want him to die because he is!” (218). Jesus’s evasive answer, “That’s what you say” (Matt 26:22–26), contributes to that ambiguity. These ambiguities may well be intentional to raise questions and engage. Even the title “king of the Jews” posted on the cross, which intends to be ironic, is an important affirmation of a profound and messianic truth (it appears six times, 236). The blood of Jesus, which is perceived as an accusation against the Jews, is, in fact, a “subconscious” assertion of a “blood kinship” between the shouting crowd and Jesus (233); what is heard as a curse that condemns could be received as a blessing that atones (234). In other words, what we thought was separating Jesus from his people is, on the contrary, the very place of his connection with them.

Jesus the Central Jew will not leave its reader indifferent. The passionate and engaging style of its author is appealing and driving. The author is well

present behind the lines; LaCocque even interrupts the flow of his writing to refer to a source he just discovered in the midst of his argument (233). Certainly the book and the thesis it carries will raise questions and objections, especially in regard to the issue of incarnation and the divinity of Jesus. The contrast between the Jewish Messiah ascending and the Christian messiah descending (276), which is drawn by Martin Buber and which LaCocque seems to endorse, is not convincing. For Christian tradition knows “messiahs ascending” (see Arianism and the endless “demythologizing” discussions since Bultmann), just as Jewish tradition attests to “messiahs descending” (see some Jewish mystical and rabbinic traditions, and consider Abraham Heschel’s reflection about that downwards movement of revelation: “The Bible is not man’s theology but God’s anthropology” [*Man Is not Alone*, 129]).

Yet, beyond these disagreements which pertain to the technical or theological discussion, vital lessons will hit even on the personal level, just as the one the lawyer learned from Jesus; he had no choice but to cease being preoccupied with himself, “and instead turn toward the suffering of others, all those human beings, Jews and Gentiles whose faces beg, ‘do not kill me’” (130). Significantly, LaCocque concludes his book with Martin Buber’s *Two Types of Faith* with which he had started. His lament, that was implicit throughout his book, is to deplore that Christianity cut its “moorings with Judaism” and thus “lost its virginity and began an incipient pagan mythological ideology.” For LaCocque it is this fault that has delayed the coming of the true kingdom of God (277).

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Land, Gary. *Historical Dictionary of the Seventh-day Adventists*. 2nd ed., Historical Dictionaries of Religions, Philosophies, and Movements. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015. xxvi + 471 pp. Hardcover, US\$116.00.

Gary Land was professor emeritus at Andrews University when he passed away on April 26, 2014. Beginning in 1970, he taught in the Department of History and Political Science at Andrews University and served as chair of this department from 1989 to 2010. Throughout his career he edited and published numerous works relating to Seventh-day Adventist history, including his service as a founding editor of *Adventist Heritage: A Journal of Adventist History*, his edited volume, *Adventism in America: A History* (1986; rev. ed., 1998), and a variety of authored and coauthored works, including *The World of Ellen G. White* (1987) and, with Calvin W. Edwards, *Seeker After Light: A. F. Ballenger, Adventism, and American Christianity* (2000). Most recently, Land completed three final works, including two biographies: *Uriah Smith: Apologist and Biblical Commentator* (2014) and *Ellen Harmon White: American Prophet* (2014), the latter of which he edited with Terrie Dopp Aamodt and Ronald L. Numbers. Land’s *Historical Dictionary of the Seventh-day Adventists*, 2nd ed. (2015) was his last published work and is the subject of this review.