

Thompson, Andrew. *Jesus of Arabia: Christ Through Middle Eastern Eyes*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2018. xxxix + 199 pp. Hardcover. USD 32.00.

Andrew Thompson is an Anglican priest who has worked in Abu Dhabi and other places in the Middle East for more than two decades. In this book, he attempts to explain the Arab culture to Western expatriates, hence the foreword to the book, written by the Minister of Culture, Youth, and Community Development in the United Arab Emirates. This statesman makes a good point when he says that “an understanding that our life on earth is not our ultimate existence unites faiths” (ix).

After an introduction, the book is divided into five parts, the first of which focuses on family, honor, and hospitality. The second part deals with religion, the third with the topic of women, the fourth with language, and the fifth contains the conclusion. The four appendices are titled as follows: “Corruption of Scriptures,” “Islamic View of the Crucifixion,” “The Identity of Christ,” and “The Bible on Arabs and Arabia.” At the end of the book there is a bibliography as well as an index of topics and names.

In the very beginning of the book, Thompson confesses that he grew up believing that Jesus was an Englishman who looked like a white person from the West. Later on, through his life and work, the author came to the conclusion that Jesus was “a child of the Middle East” (xvi). His learning process went hand-in-hand with another important discovery, namely that the Arab Muslims have a deep respect for Jesus and they love him. These, and other similar discoveries, have led him to a firm belief that the most important point Christians have in common with Arab Muslims is Jesus (xiv).

Thompson reminds his readers that “the Bible is a Middle Eastern book and it has a great deal to say which is relevant to Middle Easterners today as well as the rest of the world” (xxix). The lifestyle of the nomads and villagers dwelling on the edge of the desert will find parallels across the centuries from biblical times to the present. Among the nomads in particular, there is a sacred code of hospitality rooted in the harsh environment of the desert. A stranger can approach a Bedouin camp and, once accepted, he can expect to receive hospitality for up to three days. This leads to the conclusion that hospitality may be the single most important law of the desert.

One strong feature of Thompson’s book is the fact that many quotes are used from the Bible, the Qur’an, the writings of Ibn Al Tayyib (an eleventh-century commentator on the Arabic Bible), then Geoffrey Parrinder’s *Jesus in the Qur’an* (Oxford: Oneworld, 1965), and *The Muslim Jesus: Sayings and Stories in Islamic Literature*, ed. and trans. Tarif Khalidi, *Convergences: Inventories of the Present* 28 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), and other authoritative texts on the subject. The author is fond of the writings of Kenneth Bailey, who spent sixty years in the Middle East and studied ancient, medieval, and modern Oriental sources, especially the Arabic Bible. The following sentence demonstrates Thompson’s great respect for Bailey and his outstanding work: “This book is my hopelessly inadequate tribute to him” (xvii).

Thompson acknowledges that there are many difficult questions that the Arabs have about Christians: A struggle to understand the doctrine of the Trinity; the two natures of Christ; along with the lifestyle in the West that is far removed from the original message of Jesus. On the other hand, Muslims and Christians are united in the belief that the birth of Jesus was a special act of God. Thus, in the Qur'an, Jesus is called "son of Mary" but not the son of Joseph (*Ibn Yusuf*). Yet, the Qur'an is quick to deny that Jesus's birth was the result of a sexual union.

There are many things that I appreciated when reading Thompson's book, yet, due to the scope of this review, I can only mention a few: First, Jesus can be a good bridge across the divide between Christians and Muslims. Second, it is important to understand the shame and honor culture so commonly found in the Bible and among the Arabs. Third, there can be no productive dialogue without mutual respect. The author states that his book is *not* a narrative of the Jesus of orthodox Christian faith and history. Nor is it an apologetic work intended to "convert" people. Thompson says that he intended this book to "spark a conversation or a dialogue" about what Jesus means to both Christians and Arab Muslims (xxxii).

I also would like to submit a few constructive suggestions for consideration. Thompson rightly says that Jesus is the best point of contact between Christians and Muslims, but he could have added the topic of prayer as another good way of rapprochement between the two faiths. I like what the author says about the Arab love for their camels (especially the mention of "camel beauty contests"), yet the reader may want to learn more about life in the desert. After all, three of the world's great monotheistic religions originated in the desert. I also expected to read more about Abraham, who lived in tents, the father of all the faithful people of the book. Finally, it would be good to include Barbara M. Bowen's book *Strange Scriptures that Perplex the Western Mind* (Whitefish, MT: Kessinger, 2010) in the Bibliography and perhaps in the Introduction to the section "Biblical Culture and Arabian Culture" (xxxii-xxxiii). Moreover, regarding the Jewish customs in the time of Jesus, the author could mention popular works by Brad H. Young.

In concluding this review, I would like to propose that Thomson's work is a stimulating reflection available to those readers who are interested in interfaith dialogues between the monotheistic religions. Moreover, the book is highly recommended to all who are interested in religious topics.

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Thompson, Jonathan A., ed. *The Enduring Legacy of Ellen G. White and Social Justice*. Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2017. 168 pp. Softcover. USD 24.99.

Publication of this volume marks a watershed in Seventh-day Adventism's stance toward the theme of social justice. For most of the twentieth century, Adventist publications treated church-based activism for social justice with suspicion—at best. Especially from the 1920s to 1970s, in an approximate