

ROBERT SCOTT, *'DEAR ABDULLAH': EIGHT QUESTIONS MUSLIM PEOPLE ASK ABOUT CHRISTIANITY*. NOTTINGHAM, ENGLAND: IVP, 2011. [ISBN: 978-1844745289]

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*'Dear Abdullah'* is written for primarily two audiences—Christians who would like to be able to answer questions from Muslims gently and honestly, and Muslims who genuinely wish to understand who Christ is. *'Dear Abdullah'* is a short easy-read that presents in a simple way some entry points for discussion when Christians are dialoguing with Muslims about the Christian faith.

Scott seeks to answer in an accessible and truthful way eight questions he has formulated as representing either questions commonly asked by Muslims or questions he believes the answer to which will give Muslims a deeper appreciation of what it means to follow Jesus. Scott dedicates a chapter in *'Dear Abdullah'* to each of the following questions: How can we know an incomprehensible God? Don't Christians only do Sundays? What sort of God can be born as a baby? But don't Christians worship three Gods? Where does Christianity end and Western culture begin? Hasn't the Bible been corrupted? How can we be sure about God? Also woven throughout *'Dear Abdullah'* is a succinct account of the basics of Islam and the wider narrative in Scripture of God's relationship with humanity. Because Scott's hope is that the information presented in *'Dear Abdullah'* will be able to be applied practically, the end of each chapter includes a series of questions that seek to provoke more in-depth thought on the material presented.

Scott helpfully states the Christian theological position he subscribes to and the basis upon which he engages with the Qur'an. He states his purpose for referring to the Qur'an as being to illustrate the possible origin of objections to Christianity, and therefore steers away from drawing on the Qur'an for other purposes. For this reason, Scott avoids extensively commenting on a book that is not 'his book'. The focus of *'Dear Abdullah'* is primarily to offer an explanation of what it means to follow Jesus rather than to respond to Islam or to highlight any 'inconsistencies' or 'shortcomings' in Islam. It can, therefore, be distinguished from other works, such as Norman L. Geisler and Abdul Saleeb's *Answering Islam: The Crescent in the Light of the Cross*, which adopt an apologetics-type approach.

Scott provides a meaningful account of what it means to follow Jesus in a number of different ways. For example, in some instances he draws on commonalities between Islam and Christianity while on other occasions he shows how they differ. Scott's depiction of God as Creator God is demonstrated as a good starting point for discussions about Christianity with Muslims by reason that Muslims also believe in a creator. The expression of the Christian God as being interested in the day-to-day existence of individual human beings, however, stands in contrast to Islam where Allah is regarded by some Muslims as too immanent and transcendent to be interested in everyday life. In other instances Scott presents characteristics of the Christian God as being consistent throughout both the Old Testament and New Testament in response to suggestions he alleges Muslims make that certain of the Christian God's characteristics are novel

to the New Testament. Examples of this are seen in the Christian God who personally makes covenants with humankind and who comes to Earth to be with His people.

A number of literary works have been produced which explore the fundamental beliefs of Christianity and Islam and seek to bring them into dialogue with one another. There are works like Geisler and Saleeb's *Answering Islam* which summarise and critique some of the fundamental beliefs of Islam and then go on to provide a defence for the Christian faith by responding to arguments against Christianity which have been made by Muslims. There are also works like Badru D. Kateregga and David W. Shenk's *A Muslim and a Christian in Dialogue* (Scottsdale, Pennsylvania: Herald Press, 1997) that take a different approach in that they allow a Christian to speak to Christian beliefs and a Muslim to speak to Muslim beliefs and then present their dialogue with one another.

The mere 150 pages of *'Dear Abdullah'* and the fact that it is only written from a Christian perspective means that it does not contain the level of depth in content and analysis of other more comprehensive works, such as those referred to above. However, the strength of *'Dear Abdullah'*, when placed within the landscape of literature on Christian-Muslim relations, is its accessibility. *'Dear Abdullah'* is a good introductory book for those Christians who wish to grow in their understanding of the questions Muslims commonly ask about the Christian faith and for those Christians who would like to dialogue with, for example, Muslim friends, neighbours and colleagues. It, therefore, should be regarded as making a valuable contribution to the dialogue on Christian-Muslim relations.

One thing Scott does not do is identify for his audience that there are many different expressions of Islam, and that there is therefore likely to be variance in beliefs held by those Muslims reading *'Dear Abdullah'* and Muslims Christians who have read *'Dear Abdullah'* encounter. The variation in beliefs may be influenced by any number of factors, including, for example, a Muslim's country and culture of origin. An awareness of the existence of such variance is important, particularly as Christians interact with and relate to migrant Muslims who have settled in urban centres around the globe who are from a range of backgrounds and Islamic expressions. Another factor Christians should be cognisant of, which is not mentioned by Scott, is that there may be differences between what Islam actually teaches and how Muslims themselves conceive of what it is they believe. The best starting point in being able to identify any discrepancies of this nature must be, first, through listening.

Scott presents conservative theology at times in theological spheres that are currently subject to considerable debate. An example of this is his endorsement of John Piper's view that a wife should submit to her husband in the husband-wife relationship. As there are, however, a number of theologians who now support an egalitarian view of the husband-wife relationship, *'Dear Abdullah'* would have benefited from painting a more balanced perspective on the theology that exists in relation to the husband-wife dynamic rather than expressing the position propounded as representing "biblical truth".

With the increase in migration of Muslims around the globe and the expansion of Islam, the acquisition of at least a basic understanding of Islam and the questions commonly asked by Muslims about the Christian faith will be important not only for Christians to be able to build relationships with Muslim neighbours, colleagues and so on, but also in order to share Christianity with them in a meaningful way.

Scott's belief that "all people everywhere are made in God's image, even those who disagree with me, and they are worthy of great dignity, care and love" permeates the pages of *'Dear Abdullah'* and the approach he encourages Christians to embrace when engaging with Muslims. While Christians will not glean from *'Dear Abdullah'* a comprehensive understanding of Islam, *'Dear Abdullah'* is a good starting tool for Christians who wish to speak about the Christian faith in a meaningful way with Muslims and do not have much background in the study of Islam.

JENSEN, DAVID H. EDITOR. *THE LORD AND GIVER OF LIFE: PERSPECTIVES ON CONSTRUCTIVE PNEUMATOLOGY*. LOUISVILLE: WESTMINSTER JOHN KNOX, 2008. (206 PP) [ISBN: 978-0664231675]

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The book delivers what it promises in the Introduction. The essays represent a constructive attempt to explore the doctrine of the Spirit "as it informs and is shaped by issues that face life in the churches [and] the life of the world" (p. xiii). For a book with less than 200 pages, it is understandable that the topics selected for the reflections are limited to a few: the ecological crisis, the burgeoning influence of economics, the difficulties associated with the modern forms of empire and colonialism, the difficulties in interpreting Scripture, and the challenge of appropriating world religions. In a sense, the project can be considered as the first instalment of a colossal project and an example of what theological formulation would look like when pneumatology is integrated in the different areas of daily human life. The vision that it seeks to share, i.e. the importance of pneumatological approach to "a theology of everyday life" (in the words of Ignatius of Loyola), is convincing and worth pursuing, although the book is not the first to suggest the general idea. There is no mention, allusion or even acknowledgement of the agenda which Radical Orthodoxy propagates, but there is an interesting similarity in the desire of the authors to abolish the notion of the absolutely secular or of the *natura pura*. Sallie McFague's article that speaks of the Holy Spirit, quoting Gerard Hopkins, as "the dearest freshness deep down things," provides one of the clearest evidences of the books' agenda.

In the book, there are three articles that rebuke theology and ask it to end the welcome it has extended to the Platonic-Gnostic dualism between the spiritual and the physical which has prevented the church from appreciating the "spiritual-ness" of the bodily. Jensen opens up the discussion (and the whole book) by presenting a historical survey of how theologians throughout history have understood and affirmed the neglected and ill-forgotten fact that the Spirit works in animating and enlivening physical bodies. The Spirit, Jensen rightly reminds his readers, is the "Lord and Giver of life." Another article, situated far from Jensen's, both complements and transcends his proposal. For Eugene F. Rogers Jr., the Spirit does not only enliven bodies, but rests on entities paraphysically, "alongside, in excess of, and in addition to the physical" (87). It is the Spirit's particular agency to exist alongside creaturely existents, ordering and sustaining their contingent lives. Interestingly, however, Rogers adds that the Spirit also works *para* the Son and *para* the