

THE GOD OF ABRAHAM, ISAAC AND ISHMAEL: ONE WAY TO PEACE IN THE MIDDLE EAST

By Jaap Bonker & Maarten Nota

Krimpen aan de Led, & Initialmedia & Verité, 2008

Written by the director of AWZ, Arab World Ministries' ministry in the Netherlands, this book takes an unusual approach to examining the sensitive and enduring conflict between Palestinians and Jews over the land that both ethnic groups claim as their own. Published in 2008, this book is really the culmination of many years of personal interest and investigation into this conflict by Jaap. This book is written with help from Maarten Nota, with whom he earlier co-authored a book on manipulation and abuse in the church.¹

Leafing through the book, one is struck by the smart layout that is complete with numerous photographs. The English translation from Dutch is extremely well done and adds to the book's attractiveness. It is good that the book is attractive since the topic is sure to draw the ire of those with entrenched viewpoints on the Middle East struggle – which topic Jaap hopes to help readers approach with greater openness and charitable engagement.

His thesis essentially is that just as Abraham was the father of both Isaac and Ishmael and loved both of his sons; we too should love the Jew (coming through Isaac and Jacob) and the Palestinian (coming through Ishmael). This thesis of *rapprochement* is summarized in his statement: 'I do hope that Jesus' disciples will develop more love for Ishmael, without losing sight of Jacob.' In some sense, Jaap's book is a popular version of Gary Burge's more scholarly book, *Whose Land? Whose Promise? What Christians are not being told about Israel and Palestinians*.² Both authors acknowledge the special place in God's economy for Arabs and Jews, but Burge is not so gentle in letting modern-day Israel off the hook for abuse of its power in dealing with a disenfranchised people within its own borders. Both authors show far greater empathy toward Palestinians than Israelis without showing disrespect to the nation through whom God choose to specially reveal Himself. Both authors take us on a tour of Palestinian Territories and make its people real.

This book shows the historical interface between the races emanating from the two half-brothers, as it engages both Scripture and contemporary events to demonstrate how their two histories are so intertwined. It traces Abraham's journey from Haran to Hebron. Not allowing us to treat the story line found in Genesis at face value, the author contrasts the ancient names and locations with present-day recognizable contexts and places. Jaap's extensive visits to places like

1. Goring by Sea, UK: Initialmedia, 2008.

2. Cleveland, USA: The Pilgrim Press, 2003.

the Gaza Strip enable him to have the Palestinians come alive and help us explore the plight of the stateless Palestinian people more intimately. So does his use of the present tense throughout, which has the affect of reinforcing the connection between biblical characters and places of old with the current situation.

Some may question the shaky exegesis the case is built on to defend the thesis that God loves and favours Ishmael and not just Isaac, as in his treatment of Genesis 16:12 (pages 95 to 98) but we are still left with the fact that God does make certain promises to Ishmael and his offspring (from whom the Arab peoples come; the case for this claim is made in chapter 31), such as in Genesis 17:20.

One may also be disappointed that Jaap avoided looking at the eschatological implications of taking the stand that he has in his book.

Jaap is to be commended, though, for topically reflecting on a subject and land where angels fear to tread. He takes the sort of stance that Evangelicals around the world should be striving for, to model how to be a peacemaker and open to reason on this thorny, complex subject.

Reviewed by J. David Lundy

THE GREAT EMERGENCE: HOW CHRISTIANITY IS CHANGING AND WHY

by Phyllis Tickle

Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 2008. ISBN # 978-0-8010-1313-3

With such a grandiose title, the expectation might be of an overblown and disappointing book. I would not have selected this book to read if it were not for the president of a denomination who recommended it to me as being a seminal treatment of cultural and church history trends in the Western world church. But I must say that this is a 'big idea' book that delivers the goods. In my view, Tickle succeeds in making the case that we are in the midst of a sea change in the church. One that comes along once every five hundred years, she contends, and which has the affect of rejuvenating the church.

One might ask why should a narrow niche mission agency working in a decidedly non-Western world context, for the most part, such as AWM, pay attention to the message of a book focusing on Western religious philosophy and future trends. Well, for two reasons. Inadvertently because it might have something to say about what kind of churches are planted and nurtured; our ethnocentrism surely affects such efforts. More importantly though, if such organizations are increasingly out of touch with the way churches are forming in the West, and with how Christians in these churches think about their faith and mission, they might become an anachronism, a dying mission agency, unable to recruit the next generation of those God wants to send to the unreached world.