

I found the chapter on the Qur'an the most interesting. Cragg argues that though Muslims think God could not possibly be vulnerable to man, the very idea that God summons man to worship Him and sends prophets seems to imply that God is not indifferent to man's response. The glorious theme of creation in the Qur'an, man being made God's Khalifah, likewise does not speak of indifference. Many will be uncomfortable with the idea of letting the great 'positives,' as he calls them, be shared, of interpreting the great themes of Qur'an in such a way that they take on more or less Christian meanings. This leads up to the chapters on "Deciding by the Gospel" and to Cragg's own conclusion with reference to Muhammad.

Probably most readers of SEEDBED will not be able to accept Cragg's "positive, critical" response to the question of the prophethood of Muhammad. We would do well, however, to carefully study what he has to say about it, and know where we differ and why. This book is the most comprehensive and authoritative treatment of the subject to date. It is not always easy to follow his intricate reasoning. For most people, it is not wise to use the Qur'an to present Christ. But I was impressed with his idea of pointing out that yes, God is vindicated against pagan idols, and all forms of idolatry and self-worship of all types in our everyday lives, and that human sin is more often a flouting of God's sovereignty than plural worship.

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Elizabeth W. & Robert A. Fernea. The Arab World: Personal Encounters. Garden City, NY: Anchor Books /Doubleday 1987. Reviewer: E.A.M.

This is a rewarding and highly readable book, by two well-known sociologists, which is very helpful for understanding the cultures and peoples of the Middle East. The different chapters describe what the authors experienced and observed, and personal relationships they had developed, in certain cities or areas of the Middle East at different times in their careers. The time period is from 1956 to 1983.

After the chapters on a given city or place, there is a "Comment" section describing the political, economic, or social conditions of that area/country or its relationships with the West. The authors express their feelings and frustrations with great honesty, sharing both good times and bad. Some parts may make the reader uncomfortable, as the book is not pro-western. You should put this book on your 1989 reading list to make you more aware of the strengths and creative abilities of the Arab peoples to battle against the odds and develop their own culture.

Following the introduction, there are two chapters on their experiences in Beirut, Lebanon (1956. etc. 1981). The authors comment on the transformation of Beirut from an oasis in a changing difficult Arab world to a city in a suspended state of siege. The occasion was Elizabeth's return to make a film of women in the PLO camps.

The chapter on Amman, Jordan, occasioned by a visit with the King (1981), contains fascinating details of the history of Amman. Next is a chapter on Tripoli, Libya (1979). The authors had been invited by the Arab Development Institute to see the country and write a book about the new socialist state. Here is an interesting comment on "Unity and Diversity in Islam." ("Orthoprax is a far better term than 'orthodox' to characterize Islam, for right practice rather than right theology is primary." p.82).

After Sanaa, (North) Yemen (1981), we next visit Rashadiya Refugee Camp, South Lebanon (April and June 1981). This is the most exciting part of the book. The purpose of Elizabeth's visit to Rashadiya was to make a film on Palestinian women in the war zone. The camp was later destroyed. The chapters on Marrakech, Morocco (1971, 1976 and 1982) are very personal; the authors talk about friends they made there, and how these were faring on later visits.

The chapters on Egypt and Nubia give a very helpful commentary on the country, as well as its people. The first goes back to the early days of the republic (1959) and the Nubian project, when Nubians were moved to make way for the High Dam and Lake Nasser. It ends with a comment on "The Domestication of the Nile." The next, which describes changes observed in a later visit, ends with a comment on "Religious Fundamentalism" (i.e. the Muslim brotherhood). The chapter entitled "Hail, Saudi Arabia" (1983) relates Robert's experience as an anthropologist in the desert, conducting economic and demographic surveys among the Bedouin in the Emirate of Hail. He had also been there in 1963. There is an informative comment describing the delicate role of "The Anthropologist in the Field."

The book ends with two chapters: The West Bank, Israel (1983), and Baghdad and Al-Nahra, Iraq (1956, 1983), and a Conclusion. The chapter on the West Bank has an informative comment on "Arab Leadership"; it describes Arab styles of leadership--e.g. that of Arafat--in comparison to Western styles of leadership.

Other worthwhile books by the same authors:

by Elizabeth W.: A Street in Marrakech; A View of the Nile; Guests of the Sheik; Middle Eastern Muslim Women Speak.

by Robert A.: Nubians in Egypt; Shaykh and Effendi; Symposium on Contemporary Egyptian Nubia.

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