



Truth Over Fear: Combating the Lies About Islam, by Charles Kimball

A Review by Dwight A. Moody

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Today is the 18th anniversary of the 9-11 attack on the United States by Islamists. That event created in America an enormous backlash of fear and anger toward Islam. It also brought to public prominence a Christian scholar of Islam by the name of Charles Kimball. At the time he was a professor at Wake Forest University in North Carolina. His 2002 book *When Religion Becomes Evil* caught the attention of scholars, ministers, journalists, and curious citizens and helped many of us interpret the recent events in the light of almost a millennium and a half of Christian-Muslim relations. Now Kimball is a distinguished professor at the University of Oklahoma and once again the author of a timely book about Islam in America.

Truth Over Fear articulates in learned, winsome, accessible prose what every religious leader in America needs to know and share: we all need to listen and learn, and we need to lead our various groups to embrace hospitality and dialogue in this most explosive of all intercultural dynamics. He asserts with great authority that “the twenty-first century may well be defined by interfaith relationships.”

Kimball has spent a life in conversation and collaboration with Muslims, here and around the world; at Harvard University, in Cairo, Egypt, during the days of Anwar Sadat and Menachem Begin; in Tehran, Iran with the Ayatollah Khomeini; in New York City as Middle East Director of the National Council of Churches. He has been there and knows whereof he speaks.

The five pillars of Islam take center stage: confession of faith, daily prayer, financial generosity, Ramadan fast, and pilgrimage to Mecca. He invokes the ninth of the Ten Commandments forbidding false witness and the directive of Jesus to love our neighbors as sufficient justification for seeing, hearing, receiving, and understanding Muslims. He decries the loud, fear-laden Islamophobia that is disseminated from the pulpits and pens of too many Christian ministers. And he provides a brief history of Christian-Islamic relations and the emergence in the 20th century of a powerful, sustained effort at interfaith dialogue, especially as facilitated by the World Council of Churches and the Roman Catholic Church.

Along the way he points us toward good books to read: *Holy Envy: Finding God in the Faith of Others*, by Barbara Brown Taylor; *The Call of the Minaret* and *Sandals at the Mosque* by Kenneth Cragg; *Islam Observed*, by Clifford Geertz; and "The Declaration on the Relations of the Church to Non-Christian Religions," a document of the Vatican Council II. Another 44 are listed in the end-of-book bibliography.

Truth Over Fear offers solid practical advice for individuals and organizations (including congregations) who sense a call to address the misunderstandings of the Muslim religion and initiate interfaith community in the places where people live and work. Among these are seven questions to guide initial dialogue that allow people to define themselves and also the shared interfaith meal that closes the month-long fast of Ramadan.

What he does not talk about is conversion and this left me disappointed. The International Declaration of Human Rights states in Article 18: "Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance."

Both Christianity and Islam are missionary or evangelistic religions, always eager to share the faith with others and issue a call to believe and obey. America has been home to famous people who converted from Christianity to Islam (Muhammad Ali, from my home state) and from Islam to Christianity. A chapter on this element of Christian-Muslim relations would have pleased me, especially if it detailed how living in the religious culture of another influences conversion or the danger that is entailed by a conversion out of the majority religion of a given region.

Thanks, Charles, for another first-class book. It is perfect for reading groups and church classes, and I encourage my ministerial friends to put this book in the hands of your people. Your church and community will be better for it.