



Book Review:

Unique Breakthrough Research on How Evangelicals See Muslims

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Center for
Faith
Identity &
Globalization

September 2023

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Book Review:

Unique Breakthrough Research on How Evangelicals See Muslims

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The [paperback edition](#) of Ashlee Quosigk's very readable yet densely documented sociological treatment of American Evangelicals, vis-a-vis their complicated attitudes towards and engagement of Muslims, arrives at a crucial period in interreligious relations.

The conflict between Israeli Jews and Palestinian Muslims is at an all-time high. Correlatively, West Bank Evangelical Christians plead for Israel to suspend its punishing prosecution of a war against the Hamas terrorist organization that inflicts deadly collateral damage on innocents, including Christians. Meanwhile, a large sector of American Evangelicals expresses unquestioned support of the Israeli action, primarily because they see the Jewish state as part of the divine end-time plan for the return of Jesus Christ to rule the earth for 1000 years, while they see Muslims as spiritual and temporal menaces.

Elsewhere around the world, antisemitic violence, threats, and animosity are increasing, as are Islamophobia and attacks against mosques and individuals, including the murder of a Palestinian-American child by a septuagenarian perpetrator. All of this has had a deleterious effect on the social fabric and political equilibrium of countries in North America, Europe, the Middle East, and parts of Asia.

Against this potentially explosive backdrop, we have this fresh and much-needed presentation. Quosigk's two-year-old research findings offer new insights into the arcane sphere of American Evangelical subculture. Arguably, they also provide a clue to resolving seemingly intractable religious strife.

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Quosigk's original purpose of producing a doctoral dissertation is evident in the structure of her book. Fortunately, the author spares readers a typically tedious chapter on methods, though she gives us a good overview of her approach to the study and the tools she employed. Nevertheless, she satiates those who want (or need) more details by explaining them in helpful appendices with other valuable supportive data. What survives from her academic project makes for a good and substantive read and yields new insights into what Evangelicals think about Islam, the Holy Qur'an, and Muhammad and, more importantly, how adherents render their judgments.

It helps that Quosigk chooses to introduce her subject by debunking simplistic stereotypes characterizing Evangelicals as "intolerant, politically/religiously conservative, anti-science, as well as less educated and low status." Only by grasping how complex, nuanced, and, frankly, contradictory Evangelicals can be about Islam and a range of other subjects can anyone appreciate the impact Evangelicals have on relations with Muslims, public policy (with real-world consequences for most refugee Muslims), and social cohesion. She accomplishes this in part by providing an overview of historical Evangelical views on followers of Islam. It may be the first and only concise treatment of an otherwise largely ignored topic.

For anyone concerned about the ongoing social and political controversies generated by Evangelicals, Quosigk proves the adage, “A problem defined is a problem half-solved.” In analyzing the current condition of Evangelical-Muslim relations from the Evangelical side, she introduces a new tool to ascertain the moral authority that governs Evangelical disposition towards Islamic persons and subject matter. In amplifying James Davison Hunter’s two ideal categories (“orthodox/traditional” and “progressive”), the author expands the spectrum by including two new “hybrids.” By grading some of her subjects as *progressive-traditional* and *traditional-progressive*, Quosigk gets closer to the actual situation regarding Evangelical ethos and behavior vis-a-vis Muslims – and, by extension, a host of other social tensions.

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Before examining those other applications, it is essential to note Quosigk’s further significant innovation:

“I draw an important distinction between an individual’s stated moral authority (the authority an individual claims to have when asked about it directly) versus an individual’s evidential authority (the authority an individual demonstrates indirectly via how he or she actually appeals to moral authority when reasoning about various topics).”

The study's secret sauce is in this innovative key to interpreting and applying the study's data, pointing to its potential expansiveness. While reading about Evangelical temperament when it comes to Muslims, we also learn a great deal about Evangelicals themselves, including their most interior *modi operandi*. (Not to mention points of internal Evangelical strife. Hard to believe the author could get this far in her incidental look at Evangelical idiosyncrasies – all within 191 pages, but she does!) As important as the book's contribution is in understanding the dynamics between two consequential religious groups, it is equally important as a source for a better understanding of the largest and fastest-growing religious group, Evangelicals.

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It is easy to extrapolate from Quosigk's findings on Evangelical attitudes toward Muslims to understand more nuanced Evangelical dispositions on other moral issues such as abortion and homosexuality. For example, Quosigk's work might explain why a quarter of Evangelicals in the state of Ohio supported a constitutional amendment protecting the rights of women to obtain abortions. While such an outcome is counterintuitive, judging by orthodox Evangelical beliefs about abortion, it makes eminent sense considering Quosigk's expose of how a particular type of Evangelical "actually appeals to moral authority when reasoning about various topics."

To return to the primary focus of Quosigk's work, though, and after my having led a long-term Evangelical-Muslim dialogue in the early 2000s, what I find fascinating about the author's research is its detailed inventory of variegated dispositions toward Muslims, their beliefs, and Christian-Muslim relations as a whole. Quosigk concludes that her interviewees' views on Islam were complicated, "reflecting a spectrum of views rather than a clear bifurcation into two distinct camps." (That is, the "dominant historical Evangelical perspective" and "out of step with the dominant historical perspective.")

Quosigk spends a whole chapter tracing the development of the "dominant historical perspective" at one point observing with Iqbal Akhtar, writing in [Political Science and Politics \(2011\)](#), "Almost all Evangelical denominations' depict Islam as the 'enemy of Christianity and the embodiment of evil.'" However, of the 77 interviews Quosigk conducted, she found what she describes as a "great diversity of opinion on Islam." These opinions span the spectrum between entirely negative and primarily positive.

Perhaps the most surprising data point for me was the endorsement by some leaders and congregants indicating they thought it was permissible, even advisable, for converts from Islam to Christianity to continue identifying as Muslims and to engage in Islamic religious, cultural, and political practices. In my estimation, this represents a positive and fruitful evolution in Evangelicals regarding the perception of the other, interfaith relations and cooperation, and a better understanding of Christianity and Islam.

Overall, Ashley Quosigk has produced a revealing, helpful, and evidence-based resource for Evangelicals to understand themselves better and for all religious actors to help foster more amicable Evangelical-Muslim relations.

About CFG

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About the Contributor

Rev. Robert Schenck, D.Min. is a Visiting Scholar in Christianity and Religious Leadership at the Miller Center for Interreligious Learning and Leadership of Hebrew College. He is an ordained evangelical minister and a progressive voice of dissent in his religious community. Over a 40-year career, he has served as an addictions counselor, youth director, pastor, global humanitarian outreach worker, and a minister to top elected and appointed officials in Washington, DC. In the aftermath of 9/11, Schenck helped lead an unprecedented international dialogue between North American evangelical leaders and North African Islamic scholars. Shortly afterward, he was the subject of Abigail Disney's Emmy Award-winning documentary, *The Armor of Light*. Schenck holds degrees in Bible and Theology, Religion, and Christian Ministry and a Doctor of Ministry in strategic leadership with a concentration in church and state. He has been a visiting academic at Oxford University where recently co-convened a historic colloquium on racialized Christian Nationalism. Schenck tells the story of his religious journey in a memoir, *Costly Grace: An Evangelical Minister's Rediscovery of Faith, Hope and Love* (HarperCollins). His essays on the intersection of religion and public life have been published by Religion News Service, USA Today, TIME Magazine, Washington Post, The Chicago Tribune, and The New York Times.

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