

I think these citations from her book help you understand why I believe that this book deserves to be widely read by Christians in the West and beyond. It is tragically ironic to me that it takes an atheist former Muslim to be able to point out to Christians that they have something that Muslims desperately need – the true God of redemption, the loving Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Her appeal to Christians to get involved in the immigrant communities by caring for practical needs and sharing the message of the Gospel in compelling ways, offers, in a way, a blueprint for how we might go about the task. Her compassion for those she sees as the tragic victims of the violent ideology that is Islam, and especially her passionate appeal that we Christians help Muslim women escape from bondage, abuse and slavery, is moving and deeply challenging.

It is my prayer, that as you get this book, recommend it to your friends and give it to your supporters, that God will use Ayaan Ali's stirring challenge to Christians to launch many, many more Christians into bold and compassionate engagement in the immigrant communities in our cities in the West.

Reviewed by Don Little

AMERICAN CHRISTIANS AND ISLAM: EVANGELICAL CULTURE AND MUSLIMS FROM THE COLONIAL PERIOD TO THE AGE OF TERRORISM

by Thomas Kidd

Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009

Thomas Kidd's 2009 work: *American Christians and Islam* is a first of its kind. Kidd offers what Western workers ministering in the Middle East need to encounter: an appraisal of how Americans have responded to Muslims throughout the last 350 years as seen by an American Christian historian in the post 9/11 era. Given that North Americans are vibrant partners in the volatile field of Islamic missiology, a knowledge of the history of American involvement is indispensable in both celebrating the wisdom of the past and avoiding painfully repeating the 'uncivil missions of the mercantile world' of previous generations. Kidd's work is largely dedicated to helping us avoid what he believes are the mistakes of the past.

Kidd's expertise in this historical literature enables him to offer an unparalleled account of the earliest responses to Muslims by Americans, from the early New England period reaching right up to the post 9/11 surge in Christian

literature on Islam. Kidd gives us a way of hearing how Americans reacted to the Barbary wars (1803-1815), promoted denominational missions in the 19th century Middle East, reacted to the Arab-Israeli crisis, and more recently, have sought to zealously evangelise the global Islamic *ummah*.

Thomas Kidd's view of Islam follows Edward Said (1935-1993): 'I am relatively sympathetic to Said's Orientalist thesis regarding much of the West's knowledge of Islam and the Middle East' (xii). The problem is that Said remains a very controversial historian for having cultivated an academic 'polemic of blame' by cataloguing the vocabulary and metaphors of 'Orientalists' as evidence of embedded attitudes of cultural and religious superiority. It is true that both Kidd and Said have plenty of examples of the use of such 'Orientalist' language. Indeed, all history – prior to our own generation – is teeming with such 'outrageously negative' language.

Keith Windschuttle suggests that Orientalism, as a mindset, 'is a constellation of false assumptions underlying *Western* attitudes toward the *Middle East*. This body of scholarship is marked by a subtle and persistent *Eurocentric* prejudice against Arabo-Islamic peoples and their culture.'¹ Kidd's book works with the assumption that this critique of Orientalism is accurate and that such 'Orientalism' is wrong. However, it is remarkable that Kidd would write from within the Said school of thought in 2009 given that Said's paradigm *has lost academic credibility* among Islamic missiologists.² As the former-Muslim Ibn Warraq writes: 'In response to critics who over the years have pointed to errors of fact and detail so mountainous as to destroy his thesis, (Said) finally admitted that he had "no interest in, much less capacity for, showing what the true Orient and Islam really are."'³

In defence of the American use of 'outrageously negative' vocabulary, were they not writing to 'insiders' and to fellow-believers? Was it not once common to use *spiritual warfare* vocabulary and metaphors? Yes, these expressions have fallen out of grace in academic Christian circles – much like Victorian poetry in American high schools – but does the fact that they sound so foreign to us, prove anything more than that we have made ourselves foreigners to our own church history? And then again: How accurately can we weigh a person's missiology by popular, *in-house* vocabulary and metaphors of the age?

Kidd, being true to this school of thought, follows Said in refusing to define Islam. He writes: '...what Islam is, or what it causes its followers to do, the answer is best left up to experts' studies of particular groups' (xiii). Well, this disclaimer is simply academic 'punting'. In a July 1st 2010 email to him I asked: 'If you do not consider yourself an expert on Islam, then how can you weigh the

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Format of his argument

Kidd presents an anthology of eschatological and polemic statements from people of previous generations. His citations offer rather damaging, and what he believes to be *damning* evidence of Americans lacking courtesy and understanding towards Muslims. He deeply regrets the missionary tone, ethos and the spiritual warfare vocabulary under girding the metaphor of the now antiquated 'church militant'. Kidd seldom finds 'mature' missionary thinkers in his review. He is right; there are very few post-modern, tolerant Christian missionary thinkers prior to WW I. His short list includes Samuel Zwemer as a 'good though not perfect example', as well as post-WWII veterans Christy Wilson, Timothy George and Dudley Woodberry. Even missionaries of the calibre of Henry Jessup are debunked as suffering from a condemning 'Oriental' attitude towards the Levant culture (48-51). Jessup's vocabulary – and by extension – his attitudes, are tried and found wanting.

Kidd gives you a tour of American Evangelical literature mentioning Muslims, from the Early Americans, to the Barbary Wars, to the 19th century 'Orient' missions, to Samuel Zwemer and WWI, to new missiological overtures, to the Israeli-Arab crisis. He completes his survey with three chapters covering certain modern responses to Muslims. He deftly includes the Afro-Muslim development in the US within these latter chapters. Kidd documents shifting reactions to Muslims. He notes how American Protestants viewed themselves as quite superior to both Muslims and Roman Catholics in their morals, their civilisation and in non-violent expressions. That Roman Catholics and Muslims also saw themselves as superior to Protestants is not documented by Kidd nor seen as relevant.

From the Puritan pastors onward, Americans increasingly yearned for the collapse of both the Ottoman Empire and Roman Catholicism as a prelude to the massive anticipated conversion of Jews; and then for good measure, the Muslim 'remnant'. From the 1830s onward, this theme greatly inspired the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions in the decaying Ottoman regions. Readers will marvel for how long American Christians have been inspired by the hope for massive Jewish conversion and a Jewish return to Palestine, and how the end-times role they gave to Jews governed their missions to Muslims.

Kidd documents Muhammad's 'diabolic' reputation cited by American Protestants, and used as a means to slander Roman Catholics, deists, or sectarian opponents. He makes special mention of Jonathan Edward (1740). As Kidd wrote to me: 'People like Jonathan Edwards cannot be evaluated by the same

standard of civility as, say, (Southern Baptist 2002 president and severe critic of Muhammad) Jerry Vines. Much of American theological history has been characterized by hostile binaries that nearly everyone accepted, so that there is little point in blaming Edwards for being intensely anti-Catholic or anti-Muslim. But showing that he held these beliefs helps reveal the deep roots of anti-Muslim thought among American Christians.’ (personal email July 01, 2010) It would seem to me that in a pre-sport era, verbal jousting was the acceptable ‘sport’ of the day.

Kidd follows American literature into the Ottoman Empire where evangelising Muslims was strictly forbidden. This led to a missiology of converting Middle-Eastern Christians with the hope that they might display true Christianity to Muslims, and thereby lead to their conversion. That most of these missionaries failed to convert less than a few hundred Muslims in one hundred years suggests to Kidd the total ‘ineffectiveness’ (58) of their ‘deeply hostile’ (63) approach to Muslims. Zwemer however, is admired by Kidd for his balanced, warm, scholarly style. But then even with Kidd’s endorsement, Zwemer could list no more than six converts for his own ministry.

Reflections

Kidd argues that most Evangelical writers were not courteous, kind, or understanding of Muslims or Oriental Christians. The question is, until the collapse of Western colonialism, were these virtues dominant in anyone’s worldview? Should we expect historical writers to sound like us? Should they be judged by our 21st Century ‘Christian’ standards or by those of their own era? That they fail Kidd’s standards is clear; but would Kidd not so judge any Christian writer who exposes the darkness in a global religion? That Kidd would require all contemporary scholars to de-activate their spiritual discernment and cease applying their scriptural understanding of spiritual warfare in order to demonstrate ‘civility, courtesy, and kindness’ strikes me as shallow missiology.

Thomas Kidd noted: ‘Once you get to the 20th century, I do think that one can hold Christians to a higher standard of civility, because certain Christians were exhibiting a serious, thoughtful engagement with Islam’ (in email to the reviewer). Point well made. What remains baffling is that one of the most effective voices in reaching out to the Muslim world today is the Egyptian Copt, now American immigrant, Father Zakaria Boutros, and his very polemic Arabic TV broadcasts. That more Muslims claim his style brought them to Christ is rather inexplicable to many of us in the irenic camp. He is brilliant in understanding, flawless in Arabic, very courteous to Muslims but utterly negative concerning Islam – and that with a courage beyond anything we know. Indeed, he sounds terribly much like the previous American writers who Kidd views as suffering from being ‘outrageously negative.’

Throughout the book, be prepared to read of 'evangelism' or the proclamation of the Gospel as 'proselytism'. To almost every individual cited in this book, to describe their ministry as 'proselytism' would be pejorative and uncomplimentary, even to those Kidd most admires: Zwemer, Wilson, George and Woodberry.

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Except for Kenneth Cragg, the strong British influences on American thinkers are absent in this review. Canada too was entirely unmentioned. Notwithstanding his recent arrival to this field, Kidd's book is a valuable resource for studying the landscape of American writers and missionaries responding to the Muslims, and for good measure, for seeing how this literature can be viewed by a Said-influenced Christian historian.

Reviewed by Benjamin Hegeman

Dr. Hegeman is a colleague and friend of the editor. He teaches part-time at Houghton College in the Islamic Studies concentration (and invited me to teach with him at the college), and also spends part of each year in West Africa, where he serves with SIM as the Academic Dean of the Baatonou Language Bible College.

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- 1 Keith Windschuttle, 'Edward Said's Orientalism revisited,' The New Criterion, January 17, 1999; accessed January 19, 1999.
 - 2 Said also failed to neutralise the writings of both Islamic historian Bernard Lewis (1916-) and political scientist Samuel Huntington (1927-2008).
 - 3 Ibn Warraq, *Defending the West: A Critique of Edward Said's Orientalism*, Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2007.