



When Religion Becomes Lethal: The Explosive Mix of Politics and Religion in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam

Charles Kimball

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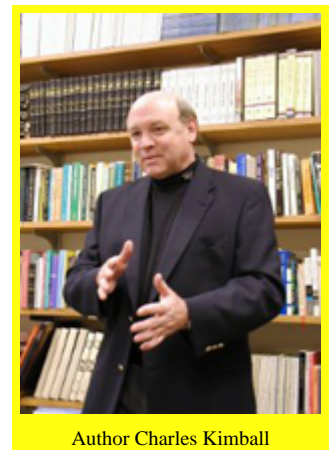
A compelling look at today's complex relationship between religion and politics

In his second book, bestselling author Charles Kimball addresses the urgent global problem of the interplay between fundamentalist Abrahamic religions and politics and moves beyond warning signs (the subject of his first book) to the dangerous and lethal outcomes that their interaction can produce. Drawing on his extensive personal and professional knowledge of, experience with and access to all three traditions, Kimball's explanation of the multiple ways religion and politics interconnect within Judaism, Christianity, and Islam will illuminate the problems and give readers a hopeful vision for how to chart a safer course into a precarious future.

- Kimball is the author of *When Religion Becomes Evil*, one of the most acclaimed post 9/11 books on terrorism and religion
- Reveals why religion so often leads to deadly results
- The author has scholarly knowledge and expertise and extensive personal experience with the peoples, cultures, and leaders involved

Readable and engaging, this book gives a clear picture of today's complex political and religious reality and offers hope for the future.

Author Q&A with Charles Kimball



Author Charles Kimball

How did you become interested and involved in Jewish-Christian-Muslim relations? I've always been interested in religion, maybe because I'm kind of a mix--my paternal grandfather was Jewish, and while my immediate family was Christian, a large portion of the extended family was Jewish. While I grew up thinking that both Judaism and Christianity were great traditions, I soon learned that not everyone in Tulsa, OK, agreed. As I encountered ignorance about and prejudice toward Jews, I wanted to know why and wanted to know more about what religion was all about. Eventually when I began my doctoral program at Harvard, I decided that I wanted to study the religious, historical, and political interplay between Jews, Christians, and Muslims. **Why were you so interested in those three monotheistic religions?** My wife and I lived in

Egypt (one block from the now famous Tahrir Square) when I was a young scholar, and I was directly involved in the Iranian hostage conflict during the Carter administration, as I describe in the book. Those life-changing experiences ignited my efforts to understand the dynamics of religion and politics in the contemporary Middle East. The combination of some 40 trips to the Middle East and my observations of developments in Israel and the emerging influence of conservative Christians in the U.S. highlighted the often convoluted, confusing, and lethal mixture of religion and politics. It's been made painfully clear that even small numbers of religious zealots or extremists claiming inspiration from their religion can wreak havoc on a regional or even global scale. In the second decade of the 21st century, the stakes are far too high for us to avoid or underestimate the volatile mix of religion and politics. **What's the most important thing people need to know to better understand the often confusing and clearly explosive mix of religion and politics in the Middle East and U.S. today?** We get a lot of our information about the dizzying swirl of recent events from religious leaders, politicians, and pundits—often packaged in superficial sound bites. For most Americans today, this has produced a kind of “detailed ignorance” of Islam, the Middle East and the interplay of religion and politics. We have a lot of details and images but no framework for understanding. It might take some effort to develop such a framework, but it's far less daunting than you might imagine. If we look at the scriptural bases for each tradition and their historical origins and relationships, we can see that there isn't actually a fixed template for how they operate and interact. But we can see clearly the dangerous and often deadly results of fundamentalists in all three religions, people who claim that they know precisely what God requires for them and everyone else. It's always a “work in progress.” **Are the dramatic developments in Egypt, Tunisia, Libya, Yemen, and other predominantly Muslim countries in 2011 a source of hope or cause for alarm?** Although our “detailed ignorance” tends to make us lump all these countries together, they are all different and distinctive. Tunisia is not Jordan; Egypt is not Syria. At the same time, there are common themes that connect the turbulent upheavals. While there are no easy answers or simple solutions, the book identifies resources and opportunities for people of faith and goodwill to help fashion a more hopeful future. When Religion Becomes Lethal identifies what's wrong or dangerous in order to point out healthy alternatives. Many of the key issues surfacing today are discussed in the book—from the major sources of anger and frustration in many predominantly Muslim countries and the ways the Israeli-Palestinian conflict exacerbates problems throughout the region to the constructive and misguided ways U.S. policies have shaped and will shape events. In addition, as we demystify catch phrases like the so-called “clash of civilizations” and clarify what actually constitutes “shari'ah law,” we can identify more positive ways to embrace the challenges in the U.S. and in the Middle East that loom before us.

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