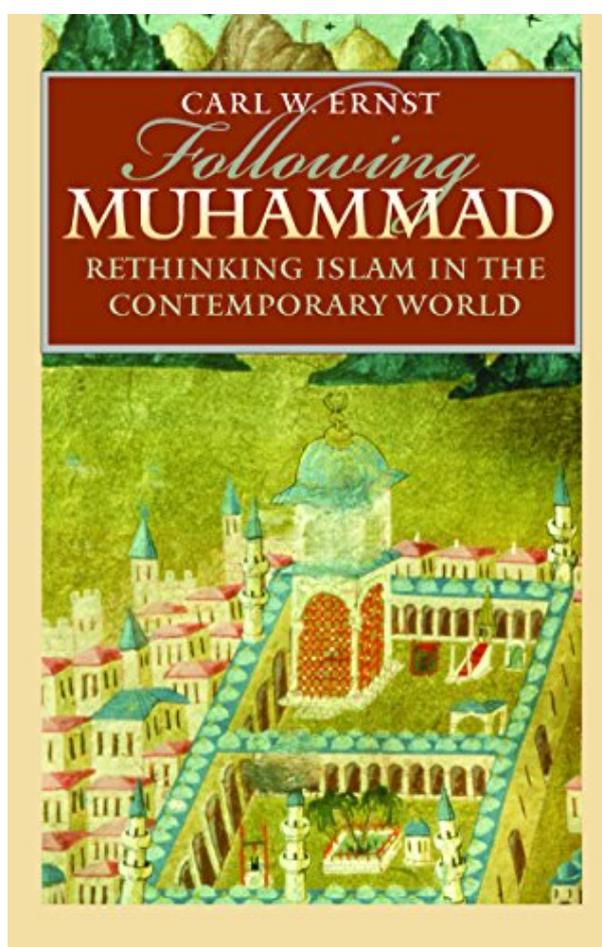
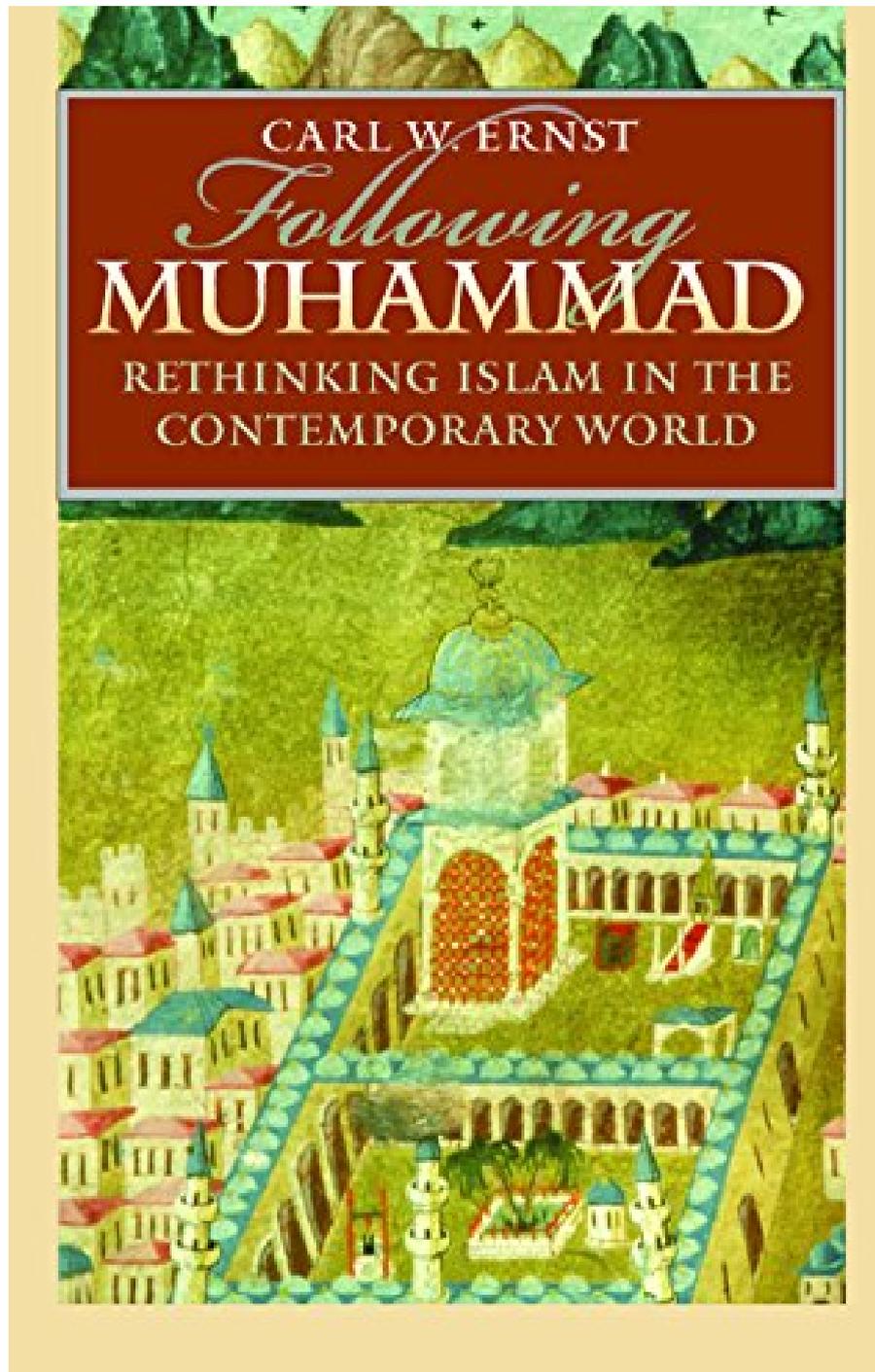


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Avoiding the traps of sensational political exposes and specialized scholarly Orientalism, Carl Ernst introduces readers to the profound spiritual resources of Islam while clarifying diversity and debate within the tradition. Framing his argument in terms of religious studies, Ernst describes how Protestant definitions of religion and anti-Muslim prejudice have affected views of Islam in Europe and America. He also covers the contemporary importance of Islam in both its traditional settings and its new locations and provides a context for understanding extremist movements like fundamentalism. He concludes with an overview of critical debates on important contemporary issues such as gender and veiling, state politics, and science and religion.

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Unraveling the political history of Islam

By David B Plotkin

Ernst's *Following Muhammed* is an excellent introduction to the history of the Islamic faith and where it is today. As one of the earlier reviewers points out, the book is aimed mainly at readers who have little to no prior knowledge of the religious tradition, and I certainly fell into this category at the time I read the book. The book definitely seems to be a response to the negative image that is frequently being cast upon Muslims in the recent years. Ernst goes through the centuries of Muslim history and describes how the way the world has seen the religion has been distorted by what he calls "political implications." He shows how the political agendas involving Islam, both from within and from its at times tumultuous relationship to Judaism and Christianity has shaped what the world sees as the single, monolithic "Islam." In doing so, he makes a thoughtful case for the religion's diversity without being an apologist.

All in all, I highly recommend this book as a starting point to the study of Islam. It is a very fast and interesting read, and provides a much more accurate and broad understanding of one of today's "hot issues" that is thankfully spin-free.

11 of 12 people found the following review helpful.

An excellent read: beyond sound-bites and think-tank "experts"

By David Fowler

Simply put, this is a well written and informative book that I would whole-heartedly recommend to anyone interested in Islam, especially someone approaching the subject for the first time. Ernst begins the book by looking at how Islam has been misunderstood, sometimes very deliberately, in the "Western" (essentially Christian) world for the last 1400 years. In doing so, which, at least to me, accounted for some of the most interesting reading in the book, some will no doubt accuse Ernst of acting as an apologist, but the evidence he brings to bear on the issue, in an attempt to set the record straight, is so well presented, both in terms of writing style and in the appropriateness of historical examples etc., that such a line of argumentation is exposed as amateurish and specious. Ernst clearly knows what he's talking about and one certainly gets the

sense that he is merely scratching the surface in marshaling evidence to support his various arguments and points.

This last issue dove-tails into the only significant critique I have of the book - namely, that I wanted MORE detail, MORE examples etc. As I mentioned, Ernst is a great reservoir of information on Islam and one cannot therefore help but want to hear more from him. However, I certainly understand the need to limit the scope of any one portion of the book, and there is a good deal ahead after these opening issues. The remainder of the book looks very much like a somewhat unconventional, though still very good, introductory text on Islam - with sections on Muhammad, the Qur'an, Sufism, ethics etc.

To conclude, one of the reasons I like Ernst's book is because he challenges us to think twice about how we look at the world - he asks us to reflect critically on certain issues (colonialism, Western scholarship, Christianity etc.) that, for some, might be difficult or awkward. But, asking us to do this does not make him an apologist for radical Islamists - it simply means he's painting a more complex picture and, if there is anything we should admit about Islam and its study, it's that 1400 years of history demands such complexity.

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Useful, compelling book for thinking people of all Faiths!

By L. F Sherman

This is a "must read" for anyone approaching an understanding of Islam as religion, as "enemy", or as a topic in the news. Most journalists and politicians would vastly better understand themselves and Islam as well as have more MATURE thinking about the issues by reading this essay. Those who claim to be "well educated" are so often ignorantly reacting to caricatures (this includes nearly all leaders and 'experts'). This volume is unique, useful, and a compelling readable discussion of how to think about religion, Islam, and the issues in the news. It is easy to read and has much to say rather than being a catalog, description, history, or polemic. **READ IT AND THINK!**

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