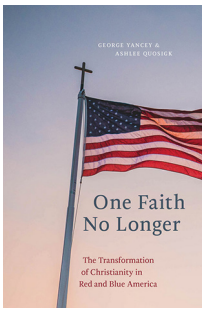
Book Review



George A. Yancey and Ashlee Quosigk.
One Faith No Longer:
The Transformation of Christianity in Red and Blue America
New York University Press. 2021.
$30.00 ISBN 978-1-4798-0868-7.

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One Faith No Longer **seeks to understand the present Christian schism between progressive and conservative Christians by examining how these groups build their "social identities," with special emphasis on whom each respective group purposefully avoids or embraces. These loci of focus exist to address an over-arching issue the authors see in circles of research: that Christians are often lumped together as a monolithic social group, which fails to account for the diversity which exists within American Christianity. The authors question whether Christianity as it has developed in the United States any longer represents a single faith, or if it has split into two major categories with distinguishable aims and means of faith expression. To accomplish this objective, Yancey and Quosigk follow a structural outline typical of books from the field of sociology, laying out a history of the issue at hand, describing methodology, then parsing through results. This review starts in the introduction because readers might overlook an important definition if they are not on alert from the get-go. The authors' definition of traditional Christianity is found in footnote one of page two (leading to page 245) defining traditional/conservative Christians as those with "views broadly aligning with those of Jonathan Edwards." With this, the authors focus in the first chapter on an overview of the modernist-fundamentalist divide and the extent (or not) to which fundamentalists have historically been active in politics in the United States.**

The authors employ a mixed methods analysis to delve into the ideological/political differences between conservative and progressive Christians. In chapter two, the authors use surveys and quantitative methodology to identify how conservative and progressive Christians "see" each other. The reactions and thoughts of different Christian groups (one progressive and one conservative congregation and a smattering of leaders representing each side) regarding how members of each group defined members and non-members. In other words, members of different groups were asked to define their "in-group" and "out-group." Amongst the findings, Yancey and Quosigk observed that progressive Christians show "powerful antipathy" towards conservative Christians while being more neutral towards atheists and Muslims.[1]

1 Readers should exercise patience in asking who the survey participants were, as the authors reveal more about the survey-takers throughout the book.

Chapter three discusses the political preferences present amongst conservative and progressive Christians. The authors reviewed blog/website articles that discussed political issues and employed qualitative methods to identify how conservative and progressive Christians framed and argued political issues. The impetus for studying these persons was to glean their argumentation strategies directed at their peers to study intra-Christian dialogue to reveal what values each appeal to in convincing like-minded voters. The case-studies are on progressive Christians who oppose abortion, and conservative Christians who support immigration reform. Of the former, Yancey and Quosigk find that progressive Christians who oppose abortion typically will not advocate for legal reform, preferring to keep it as a personal stance rather than one imposed upon the broader society. On the latter, Yancey and Quosigk detail the theological standard by which they observe conservative Christians trying to sway each other on immigration policy.

Chapter four begins by insightfully pointing out the under-studied phenomenon of present conservative-progressive splits being starker even within denominations than inter-denominational conflict that historically marked divisions within American Christianity.[2] The authors then move into an explanation of the qualitative methodology (i.e.—an open-format interview with congregation members and the leaders of the earlier survey) which serves as the basis for the presented findings in chapters five through seven. This chapter outlines preliminary findings before the subsequent, thematically-oriented chapters, and the method will serve researchers well if they are interested in higher themes expressed by the book but do not have time to expend looking more closely at the findings.

Hence, chapter five sets out (as will the following two chapters) to prove its title—namely, that conservative Christians are more "theologically rigid" than progressive Christians, but are more "socially diverse." Yancey and Quosigk bring up the "In Christ Alone" hymnal word-change controversy to great effect, and skillfully employ interview questions surrounding depravity, damnation, and the authority of Scripture to assess conservative Christian views on matters that they might not be willing to address directly with someone they do not know.[3] Chapter six shows "Progressive Christians as Theologically Flexible and Politically Optimistic" presenting that "many progressives…perceived 'Christian' to be a socioreligious category, not a term to describe whether or not one believes in Christ for our forgiveness of sin."[4] Chapter seven builds upon the work of chapter six, fleshing out the areas in which the authors see progressive Christianity deviating from historical Christian stances and their voluntary disassociation from theological conservatives.

Chapter eight answers "no," to the question of whether or not progressive and conservative Christians still belong together. Their argument stems from data they collected indicating two sides beginning to see each other as out-groups,

Findings are presented beginning on page 42.

2 Yancey and Quosigk, *One Faith No Longer*, 79-81.

3 For "In Christ Alone" see 96-97; for interviewing techniques and finding positions on "hardline" aspects of the faith, see 105-107.

4 Ibid., 141.

and finding "sufficient differences in [the] core beliefs" which produces "a different ultimate goal for each group."[5] The authors liken this split to the emergence of Buddhism from Hinduism, stating, "we are not impressed by arguments that both progressive and conservative Christians intend to serve Christ, if what they mean by serving Christ is tied to dramatically different value systems and ways to answer questions of meaning."[6] This leads to a further conclusion of significant interest for scholars of Christianity, that progressive and conservative Christians "cannot be grouped together in any meaningful way" and should be treated separately in academic inquiries.[7]

The aforementioned conclusion ruminates upon the future of Christianity in the United States given the divide the authors have identified, and presents musings which scholars will find stirring for their own research. Among these, Yancey and Quosigk question the view of Christians as the majority given their divided state, and ponder the dearth of research on Christians who claim to hold a middle ground between the warring factions.[8] They also state: "If there is a civil war withing Christianity…it is progressive Christians who understand that fact and have reacted accordingly. They are the ones who are most likely to take the initiative to condemn conservative Christians. They are the ones more isolated from other Christians and thus most likely to direct negative stereotypes toward other Christians. To be sure, critiques of progressive Christianity by conservative Christians exist, but there is not the sense of war against other Christians that is more common among progressive Christians."[9] This segment does not provide a complete picture of the rich dialogue and fierce competition between the two sides, and is derived narrowly from the research of this particular study. A more contextualized, less ahistorical approach (which Molly Worthen's intellectual history provides) quickly reveals, among other events, key flashpoints from Al Mohler's cleansing of the Southern Baptist Seminary's theological progressives to the 1978 Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy and the 2000 Baptist and Faith message.[10]

These claims also run contradictory to findings in a recent book by fellow sociologist Brad Vermurlen, whose observations in *Reformed Resurgence: The New Calvinist Movement and the Battle Over American Evangelicalism* may be read as a meta-analysis of the argumentation displayed in *One Faith No Longer*.[11] Vermurlen suggests that leaders and intellectuals of conservative theological bent "enact their accumulated symbolic power in the American Evangelical field as part of a 'classification' struggle over which Christian leaders (in addition to themselves) ought to be classified or categorized as belonging to

5 Ibid., 197; 201; 215.

6 Ibid., 204.

7 Ibid., 205.

8 Ibid., 215-224.

9 Yancey and Quosigk, One Faith No Longer, 213.

10 Molly Worthen, *Apostles of Reason: The Crisis of Authority in American Evangelicalism*, Oxford University Press, 2014, 199-202, 208, 221, 231, 235, 239-240.

11 Brad Vermurlen, *Reformed Resurgence: The New Calvinist Movement and the Battle Over American Evangelicalism*, Oxford University Press, 2020, 94, 143, 174, 191.

[Christianity] at all."[12] As such, *One Faith No Longer* may best be understood as part of, rather than removed from, this long dialogue over the nature of how Christianity, specifically Evangelicalism, should be defined in the United States.

In closing, there is much in the way of insightful commentary on the current state of Christianity in the United States present in this work, and this book adds valuable statistical dimensions to scholarship on a topic which previously was more observationally and anecdotally driven. Academics and graduate students will find the sections presenting the survey evidence most useful, while other sections have a broader appeal for undergraduate researchers. Most of all, this work does not shy away from the identity question present in contemporary Christianity, boldly asking, "is there something at the core of what this religion is supposed to represent that can unify Christians?" which demands, perhaps more so than ever, a compelling answer.[13]

12 Vermurlen, *Reformed Resurgence*, 191.

13 Yancey and Quosigk, *One Faith No Longer*, 196.