

Tape Transcription

Karen Armstrong

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INTRODUCTION: . . . of the Fall 2004 . . . Religion and Society sponsored by the Office for Religious Life here. We're very pleased that Karen Armstrong is our speaker this year, speaking on Islam: A Short History and Contemporary Issues. Roger Heyns was the Chancellor of the University of California at Berkeley during the 1960s and 1970s, later a member of this Memorial Church congregation. He used to attend regularly on Sundays, was running at that time the Hewlett Foundation and also on the board of the James Irvine Foundation. Dennis Kahns, was then Executive Director of the James Irvine Foundation, was responsible for setting up this lecture series here and help it be endowed at Memorial Church to honor Roger Heinz. Critical to this was the former Dean for Religious Life, Bob Gregg, now Professor in Religious Studies who had a very close relationship to Roger Heinz, and the two of us have worked hard as a committee of two to prepare this evening for you. Many thanks as well to the staff of Memorial Church that has also been working hard.

Karen Armstrong is a former Roman Catholic nun. Some of you may have read her recent book on that subject. In fact, I saw her at Kepler's in Menlo Park just last year speaking on that subject. She has been an instructor at the Leo Beck College for the training of rabbis in London. She is the author of many best-selling books, including the History of God, A Battle for God, Mohammed, Buddha, Islam: A Short History and a number of other books. We're very pleased to have her talking tonight about Islam, both historically and looking at contemporary issues with us. She'll be speaking for about 45 minutes and then we'll move this mike here into the center aisle and have an opportunity for you to engage her in questions and answers. Karen Armstrong.
(Applause.)

KAREN ARMSTRONG: Good evening. It's a great delight to be here in this marvelous university, and thank you for coming tonight and tearing yourselves away from the presidential debate. I realize that I've got strong competition tonight and I do appreciate you being here.

We are living in very difficult times, but it's important to remember that at the beginning of the twenty-first century, every single leading Muslim intellectual, with one exception, was in love with the West, and they wanted their countries to look exactly like Britain and France which were the old Europe, which at that time were the leaders of modernity. Of the Grand Mufti of Egypt, Mohammed Abdul was a man who hated the British occupation of his country, but he was very well versed in European culture, felt very much at home with Europeans, and after a visit to Paris he came back to Cairo and said, "In Paris, I saw Islam but no Muslims. In Cairo, I see Muslims but no Islam." And what he was saying was that in their modernized countries, Britain and France and

Europe generally, had been able to reproduce and create the kind of egalitarian conditions that were preached in the Koran, that were easily put into practice in pre-modernized countries that had not been through the modernization process.

In Iran, leading mullahs fought alongside secularist intellectuals in 1906 to demand from the shahs a modern constitution and democratic representations government, and they got it. The new parliament was never allowed to function freely because in 1908 the British discovered oil. They weren't going to allow the new parliament discover their plans for Iranian oil which they used to fuel the British Navy. But nevertheless, when they got their constitution, the leading Shiite cleric in Nadja, said that the new constitution was the next best thing to the coming of the Shiite messiah, because it was going to limit the tyranny of the shahs, and that was a project worthy of every Muslim and every Shiite.

So the idea that we have that Islam is profoundly averse to modernity was not felt at all at the beginning of the twentieth century. At the beginning of the twentieth century, Muslims when they first encountered the modernized West felt profoundly at home with it. They recognized it as something that was germane to their own traditions, and to read about this early enthusiasm I've only been able to sketch the outlines of it here, is poignant in the light of today's hostility.

Now, let's look at some of the issues that we regard as crucial to our modern society, and see how they fit in with the Islamic context. First, secularism, the separation of religion and politics. Islam, we say, is incapable of achieving a secular vision. I'm going to have a lot more to say about this later, as to the difficulties that Muslims have had with this. But, separation of religion and politics is not an idea that is foreign to Islam. In the Sunni vision, the doctrinally, yes, religion and politics are one and I'll be saying some more about this, too, later. But in practice, in the high caliphal period Muslims separated religion and politics. The court and the administration were ruled by an entirely different ethos, from the rest of religious society. They had their own aristocratic, inegalitarian and rather unforensic (?) ideology known as the Adab. It was secularized, unlike the very Koran which preaches absolute equality, this was sort of aristocratic. Caliphs, for example, had numerous wives, not the four that were allowed them in Muslim law. The Sharia, which we hear a great deal about, developed largely out of countercultural protest by the Ulama against the aristocratic ethos of the Adab. It was never originally the law of the land; it was a protest movement where people were saying come back to Islamic values, and it was not until the Ottoman Empire that the Sharia became as far as it could be the law of society. Up until that time, it was always a protest movement.

In the Shiite world, Shiites very early separated religion and politics as a matter of sacred principle, so much so that when Ayatollah Khomeini declared that because of the current emergency of the Shah's rule in Iran, that a cleric should be head of state. This was as shocking in traditional Shiism as though the Pope should abolish the Mass.

It was an absolute innovation, and today in Iraq, Grand Ayatollah Al-Sistani, has no time for Ayatollah Khomeini's merging of religion and politics. Religion and politics in Shiite Islam was kept apart as a matter of sacred principle, and so the separation of church and state is not a foreign idea. It depends, and we'll touch upon this later, on how you experience secularism.

Now, another one. Pluralists in our modern secular societies, we don't have here in the United States an established religion and everybody has freedom to practice their religion freely. This is the essential principle of the Koran. The Koran makes it clear again and again and again that the new revelation that is coming down to the Prophet Mohammed is not a new revelation. Neither is it anything that's coming to replace the old teachings of the former prophets. Constantly, the Koran says that Mohammed is not going to displace Abraham, Adam, Noah, Isaac, Jesus, that the people who belong to an earlier revelation, the *achel al ketub* (?), the Koran says and God says, are to be treated with absolute respect, *vey* to the people of the Book. We believe what you believe. Your God and our God is one. And today, Muslim scholars say that had the Arabs and the Prophet Mohammed known about the Buddhists and the Hindus or the Native Americans or the Australian Aborigines, the Koran would praise their religious leaders, too, because the Koran makes it quite clear that God has spoken to every people, that God has sent messengers to every people in their own language, and they've all had scriptures in their own cultural tradition, and that Mohammed is simply coming for the Arabs who have been, as they thought, left out of the divine plan and have never had a prophet before, never had a revealed scripture in their own language, and constantly in the Koran you'll say this is an Arabic scripture, this is your scripture, but it is not replacing the scriptures of the Jews or the Christians or, indeed, the pagan traditions of South Arabia, the Sabians. They are also, their leaders appraised in the Koran.

The test of religion is not of belief or a doctrine or a prophet, but whether it leads people to right, just action, whether it leads people to behave to other people with absolute respect. That is the principle of religion.

Now, democracy – I'm going to be talking, I really will come to these topics. I keep saying I'm going to be discussing them later, but I really will get to them.

But democracy, we say Muslims can't do democracy. Well, there are all kinds of reasons for that, but Mohammed Abdu, the Egyptian Grand Mufti whom I mentioned earlier, saw that there were very clear congruences between democracy and basic Muslim jurisprudence, that Muslim law, for example, cannot be promulgated unless there is consensus from the community. And so there he saw a basis on which the new democratic institutions could be grafted onto the Islamic model.

So we're not talking here about something alien and foreign. When, as I say, the Muslims encountered the modernized West, they recognized it as something that was

profoundly in tune with their own traditions, because they, too, regarded themselves as being part of the monotheistic family, the Judeo-Christian tradition, which had helped to nurture the modern West.

Now, what happened? What went wrong, as clearly something has gone wrong? During the twentieth century, a militant form of piety developed in every single world religion. We often call it “fundamentalism.” That’s an unfortunate term. It’s a Christian term that was coined by American Christians on the East Coast to define their reform movement, which is going to go back to the fundamentals of the faith, this at the time of World War I. And other traditions, and Muslims in particular, really resent the use of this Christian term to define their movements. Nevertheless, this kind of piety has sprung up in every single major world religion, so you have fundamentalist Judaism, fundamentalist Christianity, fundamentalist Islam, but also fundamentalist Buddhism, fundamentalist Hinduism, fundamentalist Sikhism, and even fundamentalist Confucianism in China. You have also secularist fundamentalism, too. What is it?

Let’s start off by saying what it’s not. First of all, fundamentalism is not simply traditional religion, not simply conservative belief. Billy Graham, for example, is not a fundamentalist. He wouldn’t describe himself as a fundamentalist, nor would he be accepted by fundamentalist churches as a fundamentalist. It’s not Islamic. Very often the media talk about Islamic fundamentalism as though the two go together like love and marriage and a horse and carriage. In fact, Islam was the last of the three monotheistic religions to develop a fundamentalist strain, in the late 1960s. And it’s not necessarily violent. Of the people who we might call fundamentalists, only a tiny, tiny proportion take part in acts of terror and violence. The rest are simply trying to live what they regard as a good religious life, in a world that seems increasingly hostile to religion. So that’s what it’s not.

What is it? It constitutes a wide spread revolt against modernity. In every single region where a modern secular style government has established itself, a fundamentalist religious ideology has developed alongside it, as a conscious rejection. It’s a countercultural protest. And fundamentalists typically withdraw from mainstream society, create a kind of enclave of pure faith, like Bob Jones University, or bin Laden’s training camps, or the ultra Orthodox Jewish communities in New York City. In this sacred enclave of faith, they believe they can live a pure religious life, and from this enclave some, though by no means all, will sort of launch a counter – a sort of counter offensive to fight the encroaching powers of secularism. Fundamentalists believe that they have a duty to drag God and all religion from the sidelines to which they’ve been relegated in modern secular culture, and back to center stage. And they’ve achieved considerable success in this. In the middle of the twentieth century, it was generally considered that secularism was the coming ideology and that never again would religion play a major part in world events. Well, that’s been proved to be false, and it’s largely due to the efforts of fundamentalism, so that now, today in this country, the

candidates are all sporting their religious credentials. In Israel, it's quite a secular country. Zionism was originally a revolt against religious Judaism. It's now quite hard for a government to form unless it goes hand-in-hand to the ultra Orthodox religious parties. And in Islam, which in places like Egypt, Islam is now as popular among the people as Nasserism was in the 1950s and 1960s.

But this apparent victory of fundamentalism is also a kind of retreat, because every fundamentalist movement is rooted in a profound fear. Every single fundamentalist movement that I have studied – in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam – is profoundly shaken by a dread of annihilation. Each fundamentalist movement is convinced that modern secular society wants to wipe out religion, even here in the United States. People in small town America feel colonized by Harvard, Yale and Washington, D.C. And so they are fighting for survival, and sometimes when people feel that their backs are to the wall, they can lash out violently, and this has particular ramifications in the Muslim world.

Well, what is it about modernity that causes such dread? In the sixteenth century, Europe and the American colonies later, began to create an entirely new kind of civilization, one that was without precedent in world history. It was founded not on a surplus of agricultural produce, like every other major civilization, but on technology and the constant reinvestment of capital. And this frees up modern society from the constraints imposed upon it by the more precarious economy of the agrarian societies, which could go down if there was a bad harvest, for example. And this, it may sound rather dull and dry, but it was a major revolution in political and social living. In Europe, as it tried to implement this new economy, was convulsed, from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century, in a series of wars, wars of religion, bloody revolutions, the exploitation of women and children, the dysfoliation of the countryside, great trauma. We're now seeing the same kind of process – the bloody revolutions, the wars of religion, the dictatorships – in some of the Islamic countries that are making the equally painful right of passage from premodern to modern society. But we've forgotten about it. We think we've always been modern. We've forgotten about the convulsions of this period.

Now, the ideologies in which we take such pride were the result of this modernity. Democracy, for example, didn't just come about because we in the West are frightfully nice people who want to allow the plebes a bit of a share in government. It came about as an economic necessity. It was essential for these countries to be productive, and increasingly more and more people had to be drawn into the productive process at quite a humble level, as printers or factory workers or office workers, clerks, and that meant that they all had to acquire a modicum of education, in order to perform efficiently. Efficiency was the new watchword of modern West.

And the more educated they were, the more inevitably they began to demand a share in the governmental decision-making processes of their country, which were not easily

given to them. We all had to fight for these rights. Again, we've forgotten this. People today don't even bother to turn up for, to vote, but we had to fight for enfranchisement, against an establishment that didn't want to give it to us. And women only got the vote, for example, very, very recently.

Secularism, it was found and toleration, it was found by trial and error, that you needed to use all the human resources in your country in order to be fully productive. That meant that people like Jews, who had been out of the mainstream in Europe, and Catholics in England who had also been ostracized, had to be brought into the mainstream. Things had to be secularized and become tolerant, and if you didn't do that, your country fell behind. Countries in Eastern Europe, which did not democratize and where a small elite tried to hog the benefits of modernity for themselves, they fell behind.

So it was found by trial and error that the only way to create a modern state was for it to be democratic, to be secular, and to be tolerant. We saw in the 1930s, however, that this toleration in Europe, at least, was very skin deep, because the old hatreds had been there all the time. We saw something similar in Yugoslavia more recently. What had been an economic necessity was not felt in the heart. The old hatred and prejudice was still there.

Now, modernization – now here I come to the Muslim world – modernization in the West had two main characteristics. One was independence. Modernity preceded by declarations of independence on all front – social, economic, political, religious. Luther declared independence of the Roman Catholic Church. Your Declaration of Independence against Britain was a classic modernizing document. Thinkers demanded the freedom to think their own thoughts without being, fearing reprisals from the churches. You had to have freedom of thought, independence is crucial.

The second of these characteristics is innovation. However traumatic our modernization was, at least it was dynamic. We were not proceeding by anybody else's program, but we were in the vanguard. There was an excitement about it. We were always creating something fresh, looking at unprecedented problems, coming up with absolutely novel solutions, inventing something new all the time.

Now, when you come to the Muslim world, this modern secularized society and economy did not come with independence. It came with colonial subjugation, and humiliation. Islam had been rather like the United States before the eighteenth century. It was Islamdom, the whole massive complex of the Muslim world had been something like the United States. It was the greatest world power. And when they were colonized by Britain and France and other European countries, but Britain and France were the chief colonizers, they were reduced to a dependent bloc, and even today, they are not in charge of their destiny. We've just seen – we decide who is in power, so you're not getting independence there. Dependence, modernity has come with

dependence. And innovation, we were so far ahead in the modernizing process, that they couldn't innovate, they could only copy us. So instead of innovation, you get imitation.

Now, the wrong kind of ingredients have been going into the cake, as it were, that's being baked in these countries. If you don't have independence and innovation, you're not going to get the modern spirit, and similarly, if you ask people to make a cake and they don't have a proper oven, they don't have fresh eggs but only powered eggs, and they don't have flour but only rice, they're not going to get the lovely fluffy cake in the cookbook. They're going to get something else that could be very nasty indeed.

And what some of the fundamentalists in the Muslim world are saying, Look, we see the kind of thing you want, but let us make a kind of similar cake using our own ingredients, the ingredients that we have to hand, and our own apparatus, our own ovens, and we'll produce something similar but not the same.

Now, in the Muslim world, therefore, modernization came, as I say, with subjugation, and with humiliation, and that has been very disastrous for Muslims. Unlike Christianity which has as its figure a man flayed and crucified, an apparent failure. Islam is a religion of success. The Prophet Mohammed was not executed. He was a dazzling success, politically and spiritually, in his own day, and as soon as Islam got set in motion, it went from triumph to triumph to triumph, and this continued, even when Muslims had terrible setbacks, at the time of the Mongol invasions, for example, where the Mongol hordes poured into the Muslim countries, destroyed one city after another, destroyed whole libraries, slaughtered the population. The Muslims were able to recover. They converted the Mongols to Islam, and then founded on the ashes of the old ruined lands, they founded three major new empires – the Ottoman Empire, the Safavid Empire in Iran, and the Mughal Empire, the Mongol Empire in India, which had absorbed some of the ingredients of Mongol society, Islamized it, and these were the most up-to-date states in the world, plus they also ran an entire spiritual revival. Rumi, who is a greatly loved and read and revered in the West, was himself a refugee from the Mongols.

So Muslims were always able to make a comeback and make a success of things, but not this time, not against the godless West. They've gone down and down and down, and this has been as great a problem for Muslims as Darwin has been for some Christians. Every religion has its own problems with modernity. In the Islamic world, evolution and Darwin have raised scarcely a ripple of concern, but the subjugation of, the humiliation of Islamic countries has been as problematic for them as Darwin. The Koran says that if you organize your society along the true lines of justice and respect for the vulnerable, and you sincerely try to put that Islamic vision into practice, your religion, your state and your nation cannot fail. Not because Allah is manipulating things from above, but because this is the way your society should be run. You are in fundamental accord with the basic rhythms of nature, to live, to create a just and decent society.

Now, they see the godless West prospering, and people – it's been a major, a major doubt, a major anxiety has crept in. And the UMA, the Muslim community, is a sacred value for Muslims. Every fundamentalist movement has its own flash point. In the Christian world, a Christians have always had a peculiar obsession with dogma and doctrine and intellectual conformity, and so their response to modernity has been the doctrinal challenge of Darwin and creationism and all this, and Christians are locked in great debates now about the nature of God and the nature of Jesus. This is not what is occupying Muslims. In the Jewish world, the state of Israel has been the motive power that has sparked fundamentalist movements. Either people are passionately for the state of Israel so that they see the secular state of Israel as sacred, or else they are passionately against the state of Israel as some of the ultra Orthodox are, because the state of Israel has been a way that, that secularism has impinged upon Jewish religious life. In Islam it is the condition of the UMA, the Muslim community, and if Muslims see a country, their countries in the hands of tyrants like Saddam Hussein, or humiliated by foreign powers, they are likely to be as religiously revolted as a Christian might be if he or she sees the Bible spat upon or the Eucharistic host violated. So we have to understand these different flash points.

Now, secularism has, which was something Muslims used to understand quite well, as a practical, working model, as we've seen – has proved to be highly problematic. We had in the West 300 years or so to develop our secularist institutions, and the ideas of the new modernity had time to filter down from the upper echelons, down to every level of society. That has not been the case in the Muslim world, where people have had to modernize far too quickly. So that secularism has been implemented so swiftly that it has often been experienced as an assault. In Turkey, for example, Attaturk, when he was secularizing the country, closed down all the madrases, and then he forced, he abolished the Sufi orders. The Sufis had always played a major role in the spiritual and social world of Turkey. Now they were forced underground, and all men and women were forced to wear Western dress. These modernizers, I sympathize with them. They couldn't take three or four hundred years. They'd got to modernize yesterday, and they wanted their countries to look modern, never mind the fact that the vast majority of the population had no familiarity with these new ideas, had no Western education and could not understand what was happening to their country.

In Iran, the shahs used to make their soldiers go out with their bayonets, taking off the women's veils with their bayonets, ripping them to pieces in front of them in the streets. On one occasion, in 1935, Shah Raza Palavi gave his soldiers orders to shoot at hundreds of unarmed demonstrators in Mishad, one of the holiest shrines of Iran. They were simply peacefully protesting against obligatory Western clothes, and hundreds of Iranians were killed that day.

Now, in this kind of setting and context, secularism doesn't appear to be the lovely liberating force for religion that it has definitely been here in the United States, where secularism has been very good for religion. It's felt, and it has been an assault, in Egypt,

President Nasser interred thousands of members of the Muslim brotherhood to horrible concentration camps in the 1950s. The vast majority of them were committed to prison without trial and had done nothing more incriminating, some of these young men, than handing out leaflets or attending a meeting. And in these camps they developed fundamentalist ideologies. What the leading ideologue who is the, as it were, the mentor, the inspiration of Usama bin Laden, was the man called Ty-ed Kutuk (?), who was executed by Nasser in 1966. Kutuk went into the camp as a moderate, as a reformer, but when he looked around this camp and saw his fellow Muslim brothers being executed and subjected to physical and mental torture, and at the same time heard Nasser vowing to relegate Islam to the private sphere on the Western model, secularism did not seem a good value to him. It seemed lethal and evil. As he developed this ideology, that you recognize from what the kind of horrible diatribes that Usama has been saying. The world has to be divided into two camps, he said, one good and one evil. And it is our duty now to fight against the evil. But the evil he was talking about was not Britain and France or the United States. It was Nasser. It was, and that is an important thing to notice about fundamentalism. It always begins as an intra-religious conflict. People begin by attacking or their own people or their own co-religionists, their own fellow countrymen, and only at a secondary stage, if at all, do they turn their attention to a foreign foe. Usama bin Laden began by attacking the Saudis, and only when, and other secular governments in the Middle East including Saddam Hussein, only at a later stage when he realized that America was supporting many of these regimes did he turn his attention to the United States. So people are not, Muslims are not motivated in a knee-jerk reaction against all things Western, something that they originally felt great sympathy; it starts as does every fundamentalist movement with an inter-religious quarrel, with your own people as to how you want your society to be run.

So secularism has been experienced as violent, lethal and dangerous in the Muslim world, because it's been implemented to quickly. Now, in Iraq right now, the Iraqis main experience of secularism in recent years has been Saddam Hussein, whose regime was secular, socialist. Again, this is not a very good advertisement for secularism. And neither are the photographs from Abu Graib Prison. What can they think of secularism? You know, we come in with all our high talk about how sort of lofty ideas are, and then they see those photographs, and what are they to think? And of course, many Iraqis are going to feel more moved by some, not all, some of the Shiites who were protesting against Saddam and being killed by Saddam's forces at a time when Britain and the United States found Saddam quite acceptable.

So again, we have to see – it's not that Muslims are simply in a knee-jerk reaction against secularism. They've had a really bad experience with it, and let's face it. Religion has certainly had its casualties over the years. You don't need me to mention them. Inquisition, crusade, persecution of this, holy wars there. Look at the brief history of secularism – Hitler, Stalin, and Saddam Hussein. Secularism has its failures

too. Saddam reminds us that the separation of religion and politics is not necessarily going to lead to sweetness and light. And so don't, let's just try to, when looking at the world, to see where these people are coming from.

Now, I've gone beyond my time here. How're we doing? Right.

Now, I'm going to – we've got, there are some major difficulties, though, in the modern scene, and one of those difficulties is Saudi Arabia, one of our chief allies in the region. al-Zarqawi, the man who's been taking these hostages and beheading them, he's been very influenced by the Saudi Wahabism. Fallujah is just, almost on the Saudi border there. Now, what we never have heard of the Wahabi movement had it not been for the discovery of oil. Wahabism is a form of Islam that developed in the eighteenth century at a time when the Ottoman Empire was beginning to crumble on the periphery, and it was an attempt to bring law and order at a time when society seemed to be tumbling down. And it's a very narrow form of Islam. It not only sees Jews and Christians as infidels, quite contrary to the spirit of the Koran as we've seen, but it also sees other Muslims who don't accept the Wahabi point of view, as infidel too. The Shiite, the Sufi and any Sunnis around who make too many liberal concessions.

Now, the Saudis have had vast amounts of oil money, billions of petro dollars, which has enabled them to sort of export this very narrow brand of Islam all over the world. And the Taliban came from Saudi-funded mosques in Pakistan. And we've let them do this. Now, Wahabism is not itself extremist, but in this narrow vision, this is the ground under which extremism can grow, and breed.

I would like, I was asked, I had a little email before I left England a few days ago, to say could I say something about the struggle between the Muslim extremists and the Muslim moderates. Now, what I'd like to say is I'd like to scrap this terminology altogether. Why? Because what we've got to do is to reach out to the people in the Muslim world who are disquieted, horrified by what is going on. People are always asking me, where are the Muslim voices in protest? There are reporters in Iraq who in the last month have said they can criticize the government, but if they speak out against religion, they're killed. Again, we have to understand that not every society enjoys this kind of freedom that we often take for granted. But when there are so many – these executions have inspired huge revulsion, and I've got, in fact have the time I have some comments on the 9/11 from the ordinary Muslim in the street, who said this is our fault. We have done this, we have given our children a horrible life. We have infected them with our defeatism and our despair. We've taught them the wrong things about their religion. We've given them nothing to live for, and so they turn to these ideologies, real self-criticism there which never hits the Western press. We're far too concerned with reporting the latest extremism. But we must reach out to these people. I don't like the term "war against terror" because what the history of fundamentalism shows is that when you attack a fundamentalist movement, it becomes more extreme. Why? Because the attack convinces them that they're right in their assumption that modern secular

liberal society wants to wipe them out, and certainly watchers say that the recruitment to ad-Qaeda has vastly increased since the inception of the Iraq War.

What we need to do, we can't do anything, we can't convert Osama bin Laden and al-Zarqawe and his cohort. But what we can do is reach out to the people in the Muslim world who feel alienated from the extremists but also alienated by some of the rhetoric coming from the West. I don't, I was at a conference, a high-level conference in Washington recently, and people there from other disciplines, not simply religious experts, were also saying we should stop using the word Muslim terrorism, and there's a new administration for the start, they should find a new word to say what the people who are against us, who are the wahabis, or Salafi, but do not call them Muslims. I will tell you that in Britain, when at the height of the IRA crisis, when we were being bombed and afraid, we never called this Christian terrorism. We never required the Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster to appear constantly on television disowning the IRA, or dissociating himself from it, and explaining that Catholicism was really a peace-loving religion. We knew that these people were basic criminals who were perverting and using their religion in the wrong way. And I don't like the word moderate. Some of you here are Christians perhaps. Some of you are Jews or Buddhists or Hindus. Are you moderate Christians? Are you moderate Jews? If you're asked that question, it implies that you're just Jews or Christians. It implies that you've got to measure yourself against an extreme, and it's very easy to – this kind of rhetoric – o alienate, sways of Muslim people in this way.

Recently, in the summer while I was at this conference, actually, I was talking to a Turkish psychologist who had been brought in to consult with _____, and President Bush had just visited Turkey, and the Turks, even though the Iraq War was raging on their very doorsteps, were wildly excited about the president's appearance, because their major concern is to get into the European Union. They're longing for that, and somehow this presidential visit would bring that a little bit nearer they thought, and so there was huge excitement, goodwill, anticipation, nothing like what happened when President Bush visited the UK when he got a very cold shoulder, but you know, people were excited and pleased to see him, but then he said to the Turks, you are a good Muslim nation, you are, can be a beacon of, you're moderate Muslims and you can be a beacon to Muslims in other parts of the world. And in that one sentence, the president went white, and he lost immediately the support of the middle classes and the intellectuals. Turkey is not a Muslim country. It's a secular country, and if someone came to me and said America, you are a great Christian nation, this would not go down well, and it wouldn't go down well with Turkey being called a moderate Muslim – the Turkish psychologist, I can't, this is a holy place, I can't describe to you, I said put it in the words that he said it to me, but what he was basically saying was that basically you smell, but you just learned not to smell so bad. That's how they heard it, and instantly the whole of, all these intellectuals from all parts of Turkey to march in Istanbul against the president. So this is what we have to bear in mind. These people who've

committed these appalling and vicious and cruel and wicked acts may call themselves Muslims but they do not express the tradition as a whole, and in this conference we were sort of mulling around different ways that we could call them, say we are being attacked not by Muslims but by Wahabi _____ists. Don't call it jihad either. Don't call them jihadists, because again, the word jihad, as I'm sure you must have heard hundreds of times since September Eleventh does not mean holy war. Whatever the extremists say, whatever the media says, it means struggle or effort. Muslims are required to make a struggle and an effort on all fronts because it's a hard job to put God's will into practice in a violent and cruel world. And you're expected to make an effort, you're expected to struggle socially, educationally, politically, spiritually, and there's a very important heading of tradition about the Prophet Mohammed which was much loved by Ayatollah Khomeini and is quoted again and again and again in the Muslim world. The Prophet and his companions are coming back from a battle and he turns to his followers and said, "We are returning from the lesser jihad, the little jihad, which is the battle, and going back to the greatest jihad, though far more momentous, important and difficult struggle to reform our own societies, and our own hearts." And that that is so – a lot of people will talk about the jihad as we would talk about a spiritual effort, and so don't call them jihadists because a lot of people don't like the Wahabis, and no Wahabi would call himself a Wahabi, anymore than a Muslim would call himself a Mohammedan. But it's not quite accurate. Perhaps we could call them Kutubians of the Said Kutuk, but people get into this jargon quite quickly and just remember the IRA. When the, in 1995, Serbian Orthodox fundamentalist Christians slaughtered 7,000 Muslims in a few days. Again, we didn't call this Christian terrorism. We did not require the patriarch of the Orthodox Church to come forward and denounce these people and we didn't start throwing stones at Orthodox churches. Again, we knew that this was just an evil act by people who had lost their bearings, moral bearings and all the rest of it. So in order simply as a tactic to reach out to Muslims who are appalled by what's going on, swamped by their governments, but also feel alienated by the rhetoric coming from some of our papers and on the Internet. Then we should think about revising our terminology.

It's wonderful that this university, this great university has developed a course in Islamic Studies, because one of the, we need intelligence, not just about weapons of mass destruction, but intelligence about what is Muslim life? What is going on in the minds and hearts of people throughout the world? And it's very sad I think that we're constantly having to talk about these awful events when Muslim is such a rich religion. I myself have, went away from religion for a long time. After my period in the convent, I wanted nothing to do with it, for years and years and years. I thought I was completely finished with it, but it was actually the study of other religious traditions, especially Judaism and Islam, that brought me back to a sense of what my own faith had been trying to do at its best. And what struck me about Islam was its breadth, compassion and respect for other traditions, and that's what's getting submerged, and it's very hard for people to be creative when bombs are falling upon them, or when they

feel under attack. We know that in our own lives. But let me just finish with a quotation from a thirteenth century Sufi philosopher. His name is Mui _____ ibn al-Arabi. He's one of my favorite thinkers and who's hugely prolific, hugely influential in the Muslim world and continues to be so until this present day. And I remember all those years ago when I was still so skeptical and lighting upon this passage and just being transported by it. Sufis have a very strong respect for other traditions. It's quite common for a Sufi mystic to pry in ecstasy, that he's neither a Jew, a Christian or a Muslim, that he's at home equally in a mosque, a church, a synagogue or a temple, because once you've glimpsed God, you've left these manmade distinctions behind, and here is what he says. "Do not praise your own faith exclusively so that you disbelieve all the rest. Nay, if you do that, you will fail to see the truth of the matter. God, the omnipotent and omniscient and omnipresent, cannot be confined to one creed, for he says in the Koran, wheresoever you turn, there is the face of Allah. Everyone praises what he knows. His God is his own preacher and in praising it, he praises himself, which he would not do if he were just but his dislike is based on ignorance. And it's ignorance that has to be dispelled and which will be dispelled here at Stanford, I'm sure, in your new study of Islam and your new course in Islam. Thank you very much. (Applause.)

QUESTION: Before there were organized religions, were people really as bad and did religion not usurp the goodness of man and give it to powerful people? Did not powerful people claim that goodness was brought to them in visions and that they are bringing goodness to mankind and if people were evil without religion people would just be evil?

KA: Are you saying, it's quite hard, the acoustics are not too good, so are you saying that people have had visions and have used –

QUESTION: People who gained control over other people, it seems early on and inevitably claim that they had some sort of divine or some sort of extra special abilities which almost always placed them in the better positions, in the desirable positions and therefore those who didn't agree with them, they found something that they just considered abominable and blasphemous and they formed their tribes and so it went.

KA: I think that religions began as an attempt, I say this most seriously, to mitigate that kind of stuff. I'm writing a history at the moment of the Axial Age, the age, that's termed by Carl Jaspers, to describe the period when all the world religions came into being at the same time – Confucianism and Taoism in China, Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism in India, monotheism. And then you have the Greeks in Europe – Plato, Aristotle, 800-200 B.C.E. And every single one of them except the Greeks who never had a religious Axial Age. The catalyst of change was violence. They emerged, these trace traditions, as did later Islam itself, which emerged from the blood bath of early seventh century Arabia where it was caught up in tribal violence, in revulsion from this violence, in an attempt to put an end to it, by preaching two things. One, giving up

yourself, giving up selfishness and greed, and adopting a policy that St. Paul called “kenosis,” a Greek word which means to empty yourself, and secondly, by compassion, by using your experience of suffering to reach out to other people. This is religion. This is the Golden Rule, all this. Now, of course, however, there are people who don’t want to do this at all, and many religious leaders are politicians. Basically, they’re religious politicians who are – and politicians, I’m sure, you know, it’s different in this country, but they’re not necessarily known for their lack of ego. (Laughter.) And of course you can take all kinds of people, people will spoil everything. We have a genius for ruining something good as human beings, and you can have bad religion as you have bad art, bad food, bad cooking, and bad sex. It’s difficult to do these things well, and it’s difficult to do religion well, too. And yes, certainly there are people who claim to have God on their side. This is bad religion. And it’s why some people’s idea of God is simply an inflated version of themselves, an idol created in their own image and likeness. I mean, they don’t have to be a Grand Ayatollah or a president, and they can be a preacher or somebody on the radio who says quite categorically that God loves this or God disapproves of that or hates the other, and it’s uncanny how frequently the opinions of the deity coincide with that of the speaker (laughter) because you can basically make God do anything you want and whereas the whole experience of God is meant to shock you out of this. Now, having said this, you’ve touched on something important because I think that what is needed now, especially in this country, whereas it’s passé now in Britain, is a theology of power, because you can’t simply, as you have in America, unprecedented power, masses of richness and of military and economic resources, and you can make the world do what you want. Somehow it’s got to be better than saying let’s have some vision or God’s on my side or which falls into the old ghastly traps – the Crusaders went into battle crying “God wills it” when they slaughtered Muslims and Jews, and obviously all they were doing is projecting their own hatred of these rival faiths onto an imaginary being that they’d created in their own image and likeness, giving these prejudices a sacred seal of absolute approval. Going beyond that kind of primitive thinking, but equally somehow because you can’t deny the power, nor can they give it up or empty yourself of it. Somehow to create a discussion – I don’t know what the answer is. It requires profound what we used to call prayer, contemplation, discussion, to say how do we as a religious nation, and you are a religious nation, you may not have a state religion but to my great friend Diana Eck of Harvard says that you’re the second most religious country in the world after India. We in Britain are a godless lot (laughter). Only six percent of our population attend a religious service regularly, and most of those, as I was saying earlier to some people, are Muslims. They’ve bumped up our national average considerably. (Laughter.) But you are a profoundly religious nation. Now, how do you bring religious values to bear on your unprecedented position in the world? And I think that’s something that you can be thinking about in great centers of learning like Stanford, or in churches and this is something that should be discussed, rather than the, some of the more peripheral frivolous issues it seems to me that exercise people today.

Any other questions?

QUESTION: Thank you very much for a wonderful discussion. It was just—I've got questions. One of them is the dynamic that you set up, Karen, was really a godless West and an Arabic Islam, and yet there is another Islam in the world in places like Africa and India which is really an internal struggle, that there is a struggle, and it really seems to me to be religious struggle between African Christians and African Muslims, or in India between Hindu Indians and Muslim Indians. I know personally in my own tradition—I'm an Anglican—and we did some things in the past year that really upset Anglicans in Africa and that one of their excuses for being so angry with us is because it affected their relationships with African Muslims and they thought that that was a real contention. And so how, you didn't discuss that dynamic. Would you say something about the dynamic that happens within a culture between two religions that seem to be so important?

KA: Yes, I'll do my best. This is a major question and you raise something that I meant to say in my speech, that first of all, most of the terrorism that disturbs us is Arab terrorism, and Arabs comprise only 20 percent of Muslims worldwide. The other 80 percent are basically, have been profoundly shocked, however, by the Iraq War that has to be said and are more sympathetic than they were, but this is because the religion in the Middle East has got sucked into a conflict that was originally secular, that fundamentalism, this militant piety tends to become violent when violence and conflict become endemic in a region, and that's what's happened in the Middle East, a secular conflict about a land which on both sides was fought with secularist ideologies. Zionism as I've said was an originally secularist movement and the PLO was a secularist ideology.

In the late 1960s there was because the thing had dragged out, there was distress, a religious revival on both sides and now on both sides the positions have got sacralized, and so, usually when things tip over into violence it's because these are violent regions. Chechnya is another example. And Yugoslavia.

Now, these other—Africa, you see, I think what you're seeing there, their conflict there in places like Nigeria where Arab, where African Christians and African Muslims are fighting and killing one another and destroying each other, what this is, is again, they're not impelled to do it by Christianity or Islam. They're impelled to do it because there are failing states, these are states that were created by the colonialists, artificial entities. Winston Churchill, for example, created Jordan, the kingdom of Jordan I believe after Sunday lunch one afternoon, with a cigar and a glass of brandy, and drawing lines on maps and saying, now you are called Nigeria with a whole bunch of incompatible people together. Iraq is another country where a whole bunch of people who have nothing much in common are then told to create a nation state, nationalism being one of the bad ideas of the nineteenth century. In Europe we're profoundly averse to it in old Europe. It created two major world wars and some people are becoming ultra

nationalists and others are trying to become sort of more European, and why should we pass this wretched disease of nationalism onto Muslims who didn't have it and then to Africans, create a nation state. It's failing, and people then go back to more tribal ways of thinking, other means of finding an identity. I think one of the problems – and similarly with Hindus and Muslims in India. There are big problems there between them.

But, I think the problem is, again this question of how we use religion. Do we use it simply as an identity marker? Or do we use it as a way of transcending identity? And not giving up those parts of ourselves that says ego, me, me, me, I want, greed. The fear and egocentricity that makes it every time we open a newspaper we immediately say how is this going to affect me? Do I like that? Do I want this? Religion is supposed to take you outside of that narrow parameter, but of course in times of great fear and social disintegration and disquiet, in Africa with not only failing states but the AIDS pandemic which is killing one in three Africans as we sit here tonight. They're going to look for confidence boosters that will give them a sense of identity in a world where everything is crashing around their ears, and this is unfortunately just the kind of situation that produces anxiety and it produces, it tips over into violence. Once identity becomes your main expression of religion, so I am a Christian and he is a Muslim, etc., and then you're in trouble. Instead of doing what ibn Arabi says and saying, you know, God can't be confined to any one side. It comes from inadequate ideas of God, but it also comes from great fear and anxiety again, a different form of anxiety.

QUESTION: I just wanted to give a comment. I wanted to thank you for your points on – my language might fail me – but your points on trying not to alienate Muslims and that touched me in many aspects, and I wish that you would take it a bit further. Being from Saudi Arabia myself and the idea for Wahabism, when I wasn't even, I never knew about it until I came to the States in '98 and I went back and told them that they are afraid of this Wahabism and they're afraid of us, and my cousins used to laugh. How is it that most of the idea of them hating the West, again even within, the other thing you said can be extended to Saudi. Most of our high _____ people are educated in the West, most of our people are educated have learned many things about our educational systems in the States rather than ones they were taught back home for 12 years. And I wish when you tried to find a better terminology than Muslim terrorists, not to resort to Sarafins or even Wahabis because now it's as much associated with Saudis per se, but the idea of even Salafis or Sufis, could that, doesn't solve the problems by not alienating Muslims but still does alienate nations who wouldn't like – when I learned about descriptions of Muslims who _____ alienate I thought it might be nice _____ but it would still alienate a group of people. INDECIPHERABLE. So again, I would thank you for open thoughts, a lot of those thoughts put in Islam but I would like it if was extended.

KA: Yes, I do take your point because I was not entirely happy with that Wahabist or Salafist thing too, because the Sala _____ originally, these were people like

Mohammed Abdu and people who were precisely on the side of the angels, as we would say now. But the Chinese have a very good, they did in Confucius' time, a very good ideology about the rectification of names, using your language clearly, and perhaps if we all sat down and tried to find a word to describe the people who threaten us, then we'd create something new perhaps. Kutukian mightn't be a bad idea, and then educate them in the ideology of Said Kutuk because certainly Osama bin Laden does adhere to the ideals of Kutuk and _____, but the whole exercise, I take your point, I do take your point, and the whole exercise of sitting down together and finding out who it is that we're afraid of, how do we name the enemy in a just way, in a careful way? This would be an immensely valuable exercise for us, instead of just, you know, Muslims here and Shiites and Sufis—I mean, an Iraqi was telling me the other day he gets so sick of hearing about the Sunni tribe, you know, what about the Shiite oblong or the, you know, this is all some kind of absurd thing that people have got hold of in the West, and really to sit down, empty ourselves entirely, as you say, of our preconceptions, and name who it is actually that is threatening us, and give it a name. That's not something that can be done quickly, and I think it would be a valuable exercise. And it should be conducted in public so that people begin to understand the complexity of what's involved. Thank you, sir, for your question.

CHAIR: Let's take one last question please.

QUESTION: As a Muslim I join millions of other Muslims around the world for your having written about my faith, especially in these troubled times. (Faint applause.) Thank you. Muslims in this country, like me and anywhere else, we find ourselves caught between a rock and a hard place. Every time one of these, I don't know what to use, extremists or Salafis, commit a monstrosity, there is always a hue and cry from a certain segment of the population as why the so-called moderate Muslims, why the deafening silence from them? On the other hand, there is no reaching out. For example, we are familiar with the access (?) of the Patriot Act but I'll just give two other examples. Tardi crem Adam, one of the leading thinkers of Europe, was given the visa and then he was denied and very recently Jusef Islam, formerly Cat Stevens, was turned right back, so we are caught between a rock and a hard place, and I'm wondering what is it that we can do so that we can get some benefit of doubt from both sides? Thank you.

KA: Now, you're entirely right, and this is a—I'm very glad you raised that point. It is a real problem. I was this summer in the United States in Chautauqua, the Chautauqua Institute where I go every summer, and they've started a major outreach program to sort of educate people about Islam and I ran a whole program in 2002 called "Understanding Islam," and interesting experience it was, but one of the major funders of this, a man called Mohammed Kashagi, was coming for a meeting. He gives \$60,000 a year to fund this interfaith dynamic from Chautauqua, and he was held at the Canadian border for seven hours, was not allowed to go to the toilet, and he came out shaken, and he'd come from South Africa. He's of South African origin, and he said to

me afterwards, "I never want to come to the United States again. If you want to, you'll have to—" and I said, "But surely, it was worse in South Africa," and he said, "In South Africa under the old regime, I expected it; I didn't expect it in the United States." And this is the danger. One of the greatest assets the United States had in the present struggle was its own Muslim community. Before Nine-Eleven, I was involved in a lot of initiatives, independently mushrooming from sea to shining sea, where Muslim communities were saying this country is the best place to be a Muslim, it's profoundly in tune with our ideas, as we talked about earlier, the Islamic ideal and the American Constitution, they're very germane. It's much easier to live a good Muslim life here than it is in Iraq or Saudi Arabia, so let—some of these initiatives were saying let us, Islam has always gone into countries and absorbed what was there, went into Persia for example, and into the Greek world, and was able to absorb something special from that, feed it into the Islamic process, and something creative came out. These are all the fascinating things about Islam that we never discuss these days because we're too busy discussing terrorism, but now we've got to hot up this now and try to make it clear that the, that it's possible to live a vibrant intellectual and spiritual Muslim life here in the heart of the West, and this can be a bridge with the old world, and the example I gave, and it's not a particularly good example these days, but these were happier days, was the Catholic Church in this country, which at the time of the War of Independence against Britain, Catholics comprised only one percent of the colonists, and they were a hated minority, seen as anti-Christ and the pluralism at first was very much a Protestant pluralism. No one would ever have imagined that there one day be a Catholic president of the United States. Now these are hard times for Catholics in the United States, but at the, in the 1960s the American bishops were influential in leaning on old Europe and the Vatican to push through the reforms of the Vatican Council, and that this was the _____ that Muslims in this country had, that they could adopt, have a vibrant Islam here in the United States, and be a bridge between East and West, and perhaps force some change on the old countries. Now increasingly the feel not at home here, too, and this is a great tragedy because it is a loss of one of the great assets.

Now we've got to be careful about security. I'm not being naïve and saying let it all come in, etc., but somehow—I mean, I went through that border, Canadian border two days before my friend Mohammed, the same post, and I could see these people. They were not the most skilled people at that border, I have to say. I mean, they gave me a hard time. "Why are you coming here?" And "Why would they ask YOU to give a lecture?" And I said, gosh, little old me, but you've got to be somehow again, wisdom has to come in to play, and it is difficult, it is difficult. People are demanding that you come forward and speak at, and apologize for Nine-Eleven every time you open your mouth, in a way that we didn't expect the Catholics of the UK to do in Britain at the height of the IRA problem. But, and alienating people that are a great asset to us. Somehow, I mean, Muslims have been very badly, Muslims in the West and some of the Islam countries have been some of the worst casualties of September the Eleventh, and I was in Morocco. They were saying this has been catastrophic for us. We depend on

tourism, and nobody's coming now, and our economy is going down the drain and so again, I think this could perhaps as time goes by, because America has had a profound shock. We all had a shock. Remember how shocked we were in those months after September the Eleventh, it was something that shook us all to the core of our being. I think it was fiendishly designed to do. And in America particularly, I think it was hard for you because you'd not been really attacked on your home turf before, and it always thought that your great oceans would protect you, but this is the reality now. The reality is we can't go back to those pre-, to September the Tenth when we thought everything was halcyon. This is the reality, that what happens now in New York, what happens now in Gaza or Afghanistan or Iraq today, is likely to have repercussions tomorrow in New York or London, and whether we like it or not, this is the reality, and we're all in it together, we're all suffering from this. This is a new kind of war, but we've got, while it is important to know who are enemies are, it's also important to know who our enemies are not, and that includes many of your Muslim citizens right here who are anxious to step forward and help, but are often feeling too afraid to do so. So I think we need now to cultivate a one-world mentality. We're going through—I talked about the Axial Age a little earlier. We're going through a new Axial Age right now. Again, it takes several hundred years—our modernization has been an axial development, but our religious, our leaders, our geniuses have not been Buddhas or Lao-tsus or Confucius or Isaiah or Jesus. They've been Einstein and, you know, the Microsoft people and they've been technological and scientific geniuses and the axial age, the first one was developing individualism as people, as people fell away from tribalism and the idea of the individual person standing by him or herself, it was mostly himself, but I'm afraid the Axial Age was not good about women, but nevertheless, it had an idea of the individual. Now, in our axial age, we have to have a sense of the global, and realize that we are all in the same boat, and that it was very interesting. Remember on the first anniversary of Nine Eleven when people came up and started reading out the names on the, at Ground Zero of all the people who had died on that terrible day, the A's were nearly all Muslim. They were al-this and al-that and Abdul so and so, and that reminds us again that it was not just the West or Americans alone; it was Muslims also suffered in this dreadful attack, and that's what we've got to do. Otherwise, we'll be retreating into those kind of tribal categories which is exactly what the terrorists want us to do, and so to defeat the terrorists is not a matter of bombs in my view, or military power. It is to extend ourselves of what we are, what we stand for, and your nation that has been inclusive and a welcomer of refugees must continue that great tradition of pluralism. Thank you. (Applause.)