

## No Light on the Subject: A Most Troubling Experience

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By [Jacob Thomas](#)

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I was looking forward with some anticipation to watch a lecture by a Muslim scholar on C-Span2. It was scheduled for Saturday, October 22 at 4:45 EDT. At the same time, I could not help thinking about the great imbalance and the irony that it typified. Muslim teachers and academicians are welcome at our universities and have access to lecture at our public forums. However, neither Westerners, nor Christians enjoy such opportunities in the Muslim world. In this area of Muslim-Western relations, there is a complete absence of *quid pro quo*.

The event was sponsored by the San Francisco World Affairs Council. The speaker was Khaled Abou El Fadl, a professor of law at UCLA, who was to introduce his newly published book, *The Great Theft: Wrestling Islam from the Extremists*.

After his brief introduction, Mr. El Fadl remained seated behind a long table, and looking down at his notes, he began to speak. The camera was focused almost entirely on him, and one could hardly see the audience. I am not sure whether he said much about the contents of his book. Several times he exhorted the audience to get the book, and read it.

Rather than refer to the Islamists as extremists or *Salafists* (the Arabic equivalent of fundamentalists,) he chose to call them *Puritanical*. Several times the author tried to draw equivalence between Muslim radicals and Christian fundamentalists. No light was forthcoming to shine on the theme of his book; on the contrary, there was a deliberate attempt on the part of the speaker to confuse the audience. This became very clear during the period of Q & A.

For example, when asked about Muhammad's view of women, rather than give a straightforward answer, he went off on a tangent and referred to Moses' and Jesus' attitude to women. Of course, he did extol the exemplary attitude of the Prophet toward women, by his reference to Khadija, the first wife of Muhammad. He could not have been more deceiving in that response!

A torrent of misinformation gushed out of his mouth. Honest questions were dealt with by long lectures which obscured rather than shed light on the subject. The allocated time for Q & A, was almost spent and several written questions remained unanswered. One could feel the tense atmosphere among the invisible audience as many became very disillusioned by the performance of the author, who tried to behave as a 'cute' actor, rather than a serious speaker. The meeting ended with the moderator asking him pointedly to respond to the last two questions by simply saying yes, or no. He did comply, but I was not sure how sincere he was in his answers.

The irony of the whole event that was telecast on C-Span2 was that it illustrated the confusion that surrounds the entire subject of Islam and its relation to the rest of the world. Here we are,

deeply involved in the war against Islamists in Afghanistan and Iraq, spending billions of dollars on these campaigns as well as the blood of our brave men and women; while the home front is being weakened by the growing influence of an army of Muslim “scholars” who teach at our universities, and offer advice to our leaders in government. We are extremely naïve to believe that having studied at our universities, Muslim teachers acquire objectivity when it comes to their proper analysis of Islamic terrorism across the world. Very few have achieved that. One prominent scholar of this type is Fuad Ajami, of Johns Hopkins University . Unfortunately, the vast majority of Muslim scholars who occupy important chairs at our universities still cling to the cultural baggage they brought with them when they came to the USA . What they have mastered is the art of packaging their propaganda in an extremely subtle way, so as to conceal rather than to reveal the true nature of Islam, and its bloody history during the last 1400 years. Professor Khaled Medhat Abou El Fadl is a perfect example of these propagandists disguised as moderate Muslim scholars.

This sad experience reminded me of the indelible impression that was left on my memory long before 9/11/2001. Years ago, I read an article in the monthly journal FIRST THINGS that can stand as a perfect illustration of the inability or unwillingness of Muslim scholars who while linguistically at home in English or French or German; still exhibit the traits of the Muslim mind. Some of them have highly important roles in the education of Western young men and women who attend prestigious universities on both side of the Atlantic .

The article appeared in the August/September 1992 issue of FIRST THINGS, and was authored by Professor S. Mark Heim, of *Andover Newton Theological School* . Its title was: “**Pluralism and the Otherness of World Religions.**”

After dealing with the spread of pluralist theologies in the West which advocate the equal worth and validity of all religions, Professor Heim stressed the fact that while Westerners expect Muslims who engage in dialogue to do so according to certain accepted rules, Muslims do not necessarily accept such a *modus operandi*. As an example, he cited a dialogue that took place between a Muslim professor teaching at Georgetown University in Washington, D.C., and a Swiss Roman Catholic theologian and pointed to “the difficulties [that surfaced] in a recent exchange between Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Hans Kung. Responding to a Christian presentation on Christian dialogue with Islam in which Kung has said, ‘It is important that the Qur’an as the word of God be regarded at the same time as the word of the human prophet,’ Nasr made the observation that very few Muslims indeed would view the Qur’an as other than the actual Word of God received directly by Muhammad. ‘To assume such a view as a possibility to facilitate dialogue with the Christian world or with Western world in general does not respond to the reality of the situation.’”

“Kung rejoined that this was as if a Christian were to say to a Muslim, of the Trinity, that all Christians believe it: if you don’t, there can be no dialogue. Should the Muslim object that some Christians seem at least to have reservations about the Trinity, the Christian would say, perhaps so, but they are wrong. Kung goes on, in regard *to the critical historical consciousness he commends*: ‘This is not specifically an Islamic problem, because for a long time in Christianity we had exactly the same thing. And this question was just not allowed to be asked; it was deadly.

The story is more or less the same in all religions.' With so many bright Muslim students all over the world, he added, it will be impossible in the long run for Islam to avoid these questions. Kung is convinced that 'to take a **more historical approach to the Qur'an would not damage Muslim faith** in the one God and in Muhammad his Prophet, but could strengthen his faith.'"

"Nasr in return makes several points. One is that he has not said the Christian must accept the Muslim belief in order to dialogue, only that the Christian has to recognize that this is the Muslim belief. To talk meaningfully with a person you must see what they are, right now, in themselves, and not what you would like them to be in order for you to talk to them. **Nasr also rejects Kung's assumption that the categories of Western modernity are universal and obligatory for all.**

'Let us imagine for a moment that we are all in Cairo carrying out this dialogue and a Muslim scholar speaks and Professor Kung answers for the Christian side. The Muslim may say that since the Islamic world has followed a certain path and carried out such and such actions, if the West begins to follow the same course, which in all likelihood it will, we will all be able to speak together. Returning to this hemisphere, **we see that here is a presumption that the history of Islam in the future will follow the same path as that of Western civilization from Spinoza to the present. I am very doubtful about that ...**'"

We notice in the response of professor Nasr, whose knowledge of English is perfect as well as his acquaintance with Western culture that he, nevertheless, categorically refuses to depart from his Islamic worldview and relinquish his Islamic mind. Even though he teaches at a famous Roman Catholic university, his total allegiance remains to Islam, its history, and its culture. Professor Heim remarked about this Islamic tendency by further commenting:

"Nasr inconveniently fails to agree that this is simply a neutral statement of universal principles that apply equally to people in all cultures and religions, the application of these principles being an area where Muslims have just not yet caught up. Kung's assurance that **adopting the categories of historical consciousness developed in the West need not be feared** because Christians have developed ways to cope with them --- ways Muslims presumably would adapt --- seems not to envision the possibility that those ways might be anything less than enviable to others. Nasr gently chides Kung's confidence that the modern *problems*, if not the traditional answers, of Christianity constitute the necessary crown of other traditions' development."

[All Emphasis above is mine. JT] Pp. 30, 31 of FT August/September 1992

As mentioned before, the report of this encounter between a Christian scholar and a Muslim scholar strengthened the belief I already entertained that even a thoroughly Western undergraduate and graduate education rarely alters the Muslim mind. I never cease to be amazed how most Westerners fail to realize that Islam is much more than a religion in the accepted meaning of the term. For a Muslim, his faith encompasses a total commitment to the will of Allah, as revealed in the Qur'an, and as further elaborated by Islamic scholars across the centuries. Sometimes, when trying to explain this special feature of Islam to Western audiences, I refer to the words of Whittaker Chambers in his book, **Witness**. His definition of Marxism which had entrapped him, Alger Hiss and a multitude of Western intellectuals between the two World Wars, was simple: **Marxism is a vision of the world without God**. It was a total and all-

encompassing worldview that demanded unquestioning obedience. But Islam has been and is still a more powerful vision than Marxism, for it is “a vision of the world with Allah in command.” But this Allah has revealed his final and complete will to the Prophet of Islam whose mission is global. Muslims whether they speak English or Arabic or Persian or any other language, have consciously or unconsciously one goal, the defence and spread of their faith by all available means everywhere. While Marxism afflicted our world for several decades during the past century and was instrumental in liquidating millions of innocent people throughout Europe and Asia , its vision was one-dimensional, it harbored no supernatural component in its faith. Islam encompasses this world, and another supernatural world. It plans to conquer the globe, and promises its jihadists the unending pleasures of an earthly paradise. This feature has such a magnetic appeal that sends a daily stream of suicide bombers in Iraq and elsewhere. And because the story of its victims stretches across 1400 years, it is hard for us to fully take it in; especially since most of those horrors were not photographed for posterity!

In recent years, there have been other occasions when Muslim speakers addressed American audiences on C-Span2 or on PBS stations. Sometimes, Muslim speakers had the enthusiastic cooperation of Western colleagues to sell the glories of Islam, such as in documentaries like “**Islam: Empire of Faith**” and “**The Legacy of the Prophet.**” How successful they have been is difficult to gauge. But one thing is sure: most of these presentations done specifically by Muslims or with the aid of Western dhimmis, have shed no light on the true nature of Islam. On the contrary, they add to the confusion that almost overwhelms Western people when they confront such specific issues as global jihadism, the explosion of Muslim presence in Western lands, and the possible entry of a

Re- Islamized Turkey into the European Union.

I pray to God that we never experience the fate of millions of Christians, Hindus, Jews, and others, who tasted the bitter fruits of Islamic **imperialism** across the centuries!