Compassion is Not "Central to All Religions"

Religion scholar Karen Armstrong is asking the world to write a Charter for Compassion, based on her premise that compassion is central to all religions. Do you agree? If so, what has gone wrong?

"Compassion" is a turn-on for me as a globally-minded Christian, so why do I experience this "On Faith" question a turn-off?

- 1.....As an old teacher of the world's religions, including in the University of Hawaii, I'm allergic to bulbous generalizations about religion. The notion that "compassion is central to all religions" is wishful thinking, not sound scholarship. The word "compassion" does not even occur in the extensive index of a standard text, Geoffrey Parrinder (editor), "WORLD RELIGIONS From Ancient History to the Present."
- 2.....On charterforcompassion.org, Karen Armstrong says, "I want people to hear the compassionate voice of religion." "Religion" (singular) does not exist as a public phenomenon, so it has no voice. The voices (plural) of the religions (plural) speak in and from within the religions, but the only message "central" to them all is that as Joseph Campbell, master of comparative mythology, never tired of saying eternity transcends and is the source of time, and we human beings are capable of "spiritual experience."
- 3.....Before the middle of the 19th century, Soren Kierkegaard warned against the humanist tendency to corral all religions into support for some particular nonreligious cause or virtue, as though the cause or virtue were the kernel and religion only its disposable husk. This tendency, he rightly claimed, was intensified by religion's own tendency to deteriorate into ethics. Karen Armstrong's project smells of both these tendencies. She herself is committed to no particular religion.
- 4.....Since compassion is a general human value and virtue, the ground for promoting it should be our common humanity. Indeed, this appears to be Armstrong's ground in describing her project as "implement[ing] the golden rule [empathetic entry into others' feelings] globally."
- 5.....In her project's audiovisual, Armstrong reveals her secondary motive, which is to attack the "fundamentalisms" of the world's religions. On closer examination of her spiritual philosophy, I think one would have to conclude that her own personal take on religion would exclude most of the world's *religions*, not just their "fundamentalist" forms.
- 6.....Few know that Eleanor Roosevelt was, more than anyone else, the source of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It was not *her* charter. Now, we know the name of the individual source of the compassion charter. The project is polluted with self-promotion.

But of course we should all pray and work for world compassion, and be thankful for all efforts toward it. The world aches for it, which is one reason for the around-the-world celebrations of Obama's win.

BY WILLIS E. ELLIOTT | NOVEMBER 17, 2008; 6:16 AM ETSAVE & SHARE: PREVIOUS: REVITALIZING JEWISH ACTIVISM: NOV 23, JEWS UNITING TO END THE WAR & HEAL AMERICA | NEXT: COMPASSION MAKES THE WORLD BETTER

Comments

Please report offensive comments below.

WATCH THE GREATEST DEBATE OF THE 20TH CENTURY BETWEEN AN ATHEIST VERSUS A CATHOLIC.

IT IS A DEBATE BETWEEN CLARENCE DARROW THE FAMOUS SCOPE'S LAWYER WHO FACED WILLIAM JENNINGS BRYANT AND G.K. CHESTERTON.

SEE THE 30 MINUTE DOCUDRAMA AT 11:00 AM TODAY 11/19/0 TO ALL ATHEISTS:

WATCH THE GREATEST DEBATE OF THE 20TH CENTURY BETWEEN AN ATHEIST VERSUS A CATHOLIC.

IT IS A DEBATE BETWEEN CLARENCE DARROW THE FAMOUS SCOPE'S LAWYER WHO FACED WILLIAM JENNINGS BRYANT AND G.K. CHESTERTON.

SEE THE 30 MINUTE DOCUDRAMA AT 11:00 A.M. 11/19/08 ON THE LINK BELOW

http://www.ewtn.com/audiovideo/index.asp

Christ said the two great commandments are "Love your neighbor as you love yourself, and as Christ loves you," and "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." Augustine writes, "Lord you made us out of your love for us. Our hearts are restless, until we rest in thee." The end of human life is to be in God and God in us.

God made us out of His love for us and He made man to His own image and likeness. He made man to love the Good. That is why the greatest love we can have on earth is to love one another because we are made in the image of God.

Jesus said that there is no greater love for another than one who lays down his life for another. God so love man that He gave His Son up so that man may be saved from eternal darkness and death.

Moreover, before Jesus ascended into heaven, He gave us the Sermon on the Mount and the Beatitudes that directed man to love one another and the rewards that await you for doing so.

http://www.newadvent.org/bible/mat005.htm#verse3

In addition, God gave man the Ten Commandments that from the fourth to the tenth, they command man to be charitable to his neighbor by loving thy father and mother, not to lie, murder, commit adultery, or covet thy neighbor's wife or his goods.

In the end, man is made for love, and if he doesn't love others he ineluctably loves himself for his own self and that is a contradiction to his nature.

POSTED BY: TTWSYFAMDGGAHJMJ1 | NOVEMBER 19, 2008 9:45 AM REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT

TO ALL ATHEISTS:

WATCH THE GREATEST DEBATE OF THE 20TH CENTURY BETWEEN AN ATHEIST VERSUS A CATHOLIC.

IT IS A DEBATE BETWEEN CLARENCE DARROW THE FAMOUS SCOPE'S LAWYER WHO FACED WILLIAM JENNINGS BRYANT AND G.K. CHESTERTON.

SEE THE 30 MINUTE DOCUDRAMA AT 11:00 AM TODAY 11/19/0 TO ALL ATHEISTS:

WATCH THE GREATEST DEBATE OF THE 20TH CENTURY BETWEEN AN ATHEIST VERSUS A CATHOLIC.

IT IS A DEBATE BETWEEN CLARENCE DARROW THE FAMOUS SCOPE'S LAWYER WHO FACED WILLIAM JENNINGS BRYANT AND G.K. CHESTERTON.

SEE THE 30 MINUTE DOCUDRAMA AT 11:00 A.M. 11/19/08 ON THE LINK BELOW

http://www.ewtn.com/audiovideo/index.asp

Christ said the two great commandments are "Love your neighbor as you love yourself, and as Christ loves you," and "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." Augustine writes, "Lord you made us out of your love for us. Our hearts are restless, until we rest in thee." The end of human life is to be in God and God in us.

God made us out of His love for us and He made man to His own image and likeness. He made man to love the Good. That is why the greatest love we can have on earth is to love one another because we are made in the image of God.

Jesus said that there is no greater love for another than one who lays down his life for another. God so love man that He gave His Son up so that man may be saved from eternal darkness and death.

Moreover, before Jesus ascended into heaven, He gave us the Sermon on the Mount and the Beatitudes that directed man to love one another and the rewards that await you for doing so.

http://www.newadvent.org/bible/mat005.htm#verse3

In addition, God gave man the Ten Commandments that from the fourth to the tenth, they command man to be charitable to his neighbor by loving thy father and mother, not to lie, murder, commit adultery, or covet thy neighbor's wife or his goods.

POSTED BY: TTWSYFAMDGGAHJMJ1 | NOVEMBER 19, 2008 9:25 AM REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT

Frankly, Reverend, I'd rather appeal to the 'better angels of our natures.' Cause if you start saying there isn't a core of compassion in all religions, yours is the first to go.

POSTED BY: PAGANPLACE | NOVEMBER 19, 2008 1:20 AM REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT

Dr. Elliott:

I wonder that your essay engendered opposition. Armstrong appalls me, quite an achievement since I am a brown person. If I were Christian, I'd probably reference Niebuhr in this discussion. But being decidedly Jewish and an atheist, I shall turn to Emanuel Levinas. What is needed is an ethicist of ethics, and he is our man. Not to say his thinking ever was or is now, post mortem, outside of culture, no more so than "compassion."

I think you have been quite kind to Armstrong, whereas I have never been. I find her intellectually weak, semiliterate, saccharine, incoherent ooey gooey glopschtick.

POSTED BY: FARNAZ2 | NOVEMBER 18, 2008 11:50 PM REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT

The title of your article is divisive and the remainder of the article follows the same route. Please go back into your hole. I thought we repudiated this form of ideology on Nov 4 2008

POSTED BY: KINGOFKINGS1 | NOVEMBER 18, 2008 11:21 PM REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT

The title of your article is divisive and the rest of your article is therefore not worth reading. Please go back into your hole.

POSTED BY: KINGOFKINGS1 | NOVEMBER 18, 2008 11:07 PM REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT

Dr. Elliott,

I just wanted to be clear that I do not negate your judgements of another. We judge. We have the idea that non-judgementalism is better but do poorly living in that state.

Yet you are an authority in religious matters, and a member of this panel offering opinions, and it does not jibe for me the perceived contradiction between the concept of supporting compassion and inter-religious dialogue and the practice of negating the efforts of another to do that.

It appears more personal. Perhaps it is not. Perhaps she just wants to make a bucket of money off of those disaffected by mainstream religions. Hey, there is another article on religious opportunism on the forum... Not the first time. But I don't get that here, myself.

Best.

Justin

POSTED BY: JUSTILLTHEN | NOVEMBER 18, 2008 10:38 PM REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT

Dr. Elliott.

Thank you for your response in 'further clarifications'. I understand and appreciate your words reaching out toward commonality in all religions and gratitude for all efforts encouraging compassion... Yet, this effort by Mrs Armstrong IS an effort, and it has some possibility to be a rewarding one on some levels. You withhold support of it and so clearly do not have gratitude for all efforts, but judgement of some. You show clear distaste for her effort, having made the judgement that she is self promoting and using all religions toward her own ends. Your quote:

"But I cannot support any compaign based on false premise & endeavoring to corral "all religions" into promoting a personal cause."

I withhold judgement on it. I do not know. And in a way it does not matter. We all include ourselves and our beliefs in our work. You have noted a number of times what you have done in your career and that is normal. The question for me is "does it work to further peace?". Or to further dialogue on compassion. If she is a self promoter, and succeeds in furthering dialogue for peace, then I am all for her promotion.

Barak Obama promoted himself, and is about to put into action his plan for furthering this country. John McCain would be doing the same. Self promoters.

I wish her well with the concept... At least she is putting something into play.

3

Yes to this of yours, SPARROW4: "Compassion is an open field and no fence."

Does this mean that compassion is given or received without reservations?

Again, it is my understanding that Jesus was not so selective in who He was compassion with.

POSTED BY: JUSTILLTHEN | NOVEMBER 18, 2008 9:22 PM REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT

You actually already did, sir. My point is that taking someone else's statements out of context and not inviting them to present their *own* ideas means that you have essentially taken someone else's belief system and made it mean what you want it to mean. Pretty easy to do when the other person isn't there to open up an actual dialogue.

That's not the mark of a qualified teacher.

Further Clarifications:

1

Thank you, SPARROW4, for your generous & accurate comment. I do indeed get angry at anyone who preaches virtue (in this case, compassion) while practicing falsehood (here, that this virtue is "central to all religions") & promoting self. And I'm not lothe to being "personal" about it.

At first, you experienced my anger as a turn-off on me & a shut-off on hearing my message. You were obedient to the American middle-class ethos of being "nice to everybody": no confrontation in the interest of truth or even love. I thank God & you that you are now beyond that, & can hear me.

2

JUSTILLTHEN, I'm with your concern that we all learn to see & appreciate what is common to all religions. To that end, at the University of Hawaii I taught a course titled "Religion and the Meaning of Human Existence." And my "On Faith" piece expressed gratitude for "all efforts" encouraging compassion. But I cannot support any compaign based on false premise & endeavoring to corral "all religions" into promoting a personal cause.

3

Yes to this of yours, SPARROW4: "Compassion is an open field and no fence."

4

MOKEY2: I agree that it would be "reprehensible" to make public use, without permission, of a personal name to support an idea or cause. I have never done so. Sorry I so wrote that you could misread me.

POSTED BY: WILLIS E. ELLIOTT | NOVEMBER 18, 2008 3:50 PM REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT

matthewbrensilver:

I am not certain the Mr. Elliott is "discerning the strained efforts to find a common sanity amongst religious traditions". Perhaps he is. And I would not doubt there is some validity to his assertion that Mrs. Armstrongs project has aspects of self-promotion. But he seems to go beyond simple criticism, as he is clearly doing, and into the realm of seeking to discredit the project. In his essay he writes:

"3.....Before the middle of the 19th century, Soren Kierkegaard warned against the humanist tendency to corral all religions into support for some particular nonreligious cause or virtue, as though the cause or virtue were the kernel and religion only its disposable husk. This tendency, he rightly claimed, was intensified by religion's own tendency to deteriorate into ethics. Karen Armstrong's project smells of both these tendencies. She herself is committed to no particular religion."

I do not know if Mrs. Armstrong is "committed" to no religion, but I do not condemn her if she is not. The statement above suggests that Mr. Elliott considers religion to be the more important and essential kernel and "humanist" causes and virtues to be the disposable part, (outside of the metaphor of the body, disposable, being the husk! of course). I question that. I think that religions, essentially man made, human organizations, are formed around sacred experiences and or 'texts', (man scribed, in the least), in order to make better sense of the transformational mystical experiences that you mentioned. These experiences and the deeper self or soul that is intertwined with the Divine at the deepest level, ARE the kernel. All else, religions included, are the husk. Good religions, moralities, teachings, conditionings, etc. that are of benefit to the health and growth of the kernel are desireable. The rest or the chaff, suffocating religious dogma included, should be rightly rejected.

There is no formula as to what works for one individual and not for another. But at a time we might easily outgrow even what served us well earlier.

There is too much vested interest in religious heirarchy to maintain traditional form of the religion as if it is the religion that is the point.

And not enough attention to the development of the individual soul.

POSTED BY: JUSTILLTHEN | NOVEMBER 18, 2008 3:29 PM REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT

Mr. Elliot, I think, is correct in discerning the strained efforts to find a common sanity amongst religious traditions. However, these labored efforts are likely more helpful than the encouragement for religious folks go about finding phrases in their respective holy books that divide humanity and imperil civil society.

If there is, in fact, a genuine experience that is shared across religions, it is the transformational mystical experience. This experience is described in very similar ways by people emerging from very different religious traditions. Interestingly, these experiences tend to produce individuals who speak primarily about interconnection and compassion.

Leaving religion to those who merely try to think their way to god will leave us with a very fragmented world.

POSTED BY: MATTHEWBRENSILVER | NOVEMBER 18, 2008 2:56 PM REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT

sparrow4:

Thanks for the post.

"I would have liked her to have included those who don't necessarily believe in G-d. After all, some of the purest forms of compassion are practiced by those who do it out of human kinship, not religion."

And I agree. Religion has a way of infusing expectations of outcome, judgements inherent in the belief system, requirements to practice compassion and so pressure to be giving....

Compassion that comes out of the hearts need to reach out and commune with those in need is less encumbered by these weights... Compassion motivated by human kinship can come naturally out of religious conditioning, just as I can learn to love better if I follow certain moral codes than others.

Still, pure love feels nicer than 'love' encumbered by a rigid spiritual system.

Best, sparrow.

Justin

POSTED BY: JUSTILLTHEN | NOVEMBER 17, 2008 11:37 PM REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT

Sailed right past my question about whether you have an alternative way to encourage more compassion in the world.

A faulty premise in this case, if it is faulty, doesn't have any effect on whether the project can succeed or not. The idea is to promote more compassion. Whether compassion is at the heart of religion is truly irrelevant-the important part is whether they come up with something that actually encourages more compassion. I think it just might do that. I find many of the posts on the site so far to be quite inspiring.

Based on my study of Ms. Armstrong's body of work, I'd take her word over yours on most any religious issue. Have you actually read her work?

POSTED BY: JLH6789 | NOVEMBER 17, 2008 10:39 PM REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT

It is not a 'wild misfit'. My assertions are based on your interactions with others on previous questions on your site. You specifically told at least one person that you intended to display their postings at one of your sermons with no participatory invitation extended to them so that they can present their side. This leads ultimately to you deciding what other people believe and presenting it as such to a congregation or classroom who doesn't know any better.

That is reprehensible. And indicative of pure arrogance on your part.

POSTED BY: MOKEY2 | NOVEMBER 17, 2008 7:09 PM

REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT

justillthen- totally agree. Compassion is part of all religions, and the "other isms" as well. whether it's practiced or not is a different story but I was also surprised at some of the very mean-spirited replies to Ms. Armstrong's call for a charter. I would have liked her to have included those who don't necessarily believe in G-d. After all, some of the purest forms of compassion are practiced by those who do it out of human kinship, not religion.

Whether we are "hard-wired" for compassion, or we do it out of religious teaching, the end result should be the same- helping one another. Maybe it's more to the point to say that compassion isn't a territory you have to stake out and protect. Compassion is an open field and no fence.

POSTED BY: SPARROW4 | NOVEMBER 17, 2008 6:45 PM

REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT

I do not neccessarily agree that compassion is not central in the worlds major religions. It seems to me that in one way or another it is central in the mythic understanding of God or as guidance for spiritual practice. It certainly seems to be the expectation for how one treats those of their own religious affiliation, if not the world in general.

I am not a scholar of religion, though very interested, and do not think that scholarly expertise is required of me to participate here. You clearly believe that Mrs. Armstrong oversteps her bounds by inferring that compassion is universal in religions and calling for a "Charter" based on that 'falsehood'.

Whatever a Charter would be is interesting, perhaps, but more valuable to me is the question of CAN the project be a helpful tool in moving forward meaningful dialogue between people of diverse spiritual beliefs. If so, it is a win. If not, if is a worthy attempt.

I would have to say that of the various guest writers and contributors in On Faith many have been far from encouraging of open dialogue. Some have been straight up discouraging. Perhaps it could be attributed to scholastic differences, or professional infighting or offenses... I have noticed more than a few times clear messages of disregard between guest writers... But I believe that a larger problem is with those who have too deep a vested interest in more exclusive religions, and rue the concept that there MAY BE certain commonality with all religions.

It takes away from something that they may consider specifically owned by their own religion.

You state in your clarification #4:

"A starry-eyed improbability. The probability: garbage in, garbage out."

A bit harsh, no? You seem to be writing off the experiment before the outcome, indeed before it has a chance to move off the ground... Is that not some form of sabotage of what could be, (for lay folks at least if not for the 'scholarly'), a valuable excercise in inter-religious communication?

Mr. Colson, well known as a very right leaning fundamentalist, seems to give a thumbs up without falling into Mrs. Armstrongs utopian leanings. Mr. Reynolds took up a sword as he was sure his fundamentalism was being attacked by a demon, and started to "kick the puppy". You seem to ridicule her.

I am amazed that a call to dialogue on compassion brings up for some anything but compassion.

POSTED BY: JUSTILLTHEN | NOVEMBER 17, 2008 6:17 PM REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT

"Compassion is a human reality we're all wired for, and some more than others activate it under various motivations, religion being one. Activated, compassion is a virtue; and a world "charter" promoting it is a good idea. But the charter's appeal should be on the basis of our common humanity, not one motivator - especially not religion, the motivator inclining to disagreements, not world cooperation."

This is what I wanted to know from you. But truthfully in your essay and all your replies what I got most was you have a real anger against Armstrong and obviously it's personal. Once that became obvious it was difficult to get your message. With all your experience and scholarship and expertise, you couldn't have refuted her without insulting her?

you wrote re mokey: "But here's an ironic fact: accusing anybody of self-promotion automatically boomerangs in the public mind." Yet this is exactly what you did when you said "Now, we know the name of the individual source of the compassion charter. The project is polluted with self-promotion."

thanks for the clarifications - I don't agree with all of them but was certainly kind of you to take the time, not once, but twice, to respond to us.

POSTED BY: SPARROW4 | NOVEMBER 17, 2008 5:45 PM REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT

Clarifications:

1

No comment (except DANIELINTHELIONSDEN and NORRIEHOYT) has confronted the flat fact that compassion is NOT (as Armstrong affirms) "central to all religions." That negation, in my title, is the clue on how to read my entry.

2

Any scholar in religion who premises a world appeal for anything on the basis of a flat error in religion - what can such a scholar be up to? Such a scholar is a disgrace to scholarship and to religion, and I would say so no matter the person's name. To read personal animus into what I wrote is off-subject and unfair.

3

Compassion is a human reality we're all wired for, and some more than others activate it under various motivations, religion being one. Activated, compassion is a virtue; and a world "charter" promoting it is a good idea. But the charter's appeal should be on the basis of our common humanity, not one motivator - especially not religion, the motivator inclining to disagreements, not world cooperation.

4

JLH6789 asks "what if the starting premise is wrong if the final result is good?" A starry-eyed improbability. The probability: garbage in, garbage out. / No, I don't think Karen Armstrong is "the wrong person" to propose a world charter on compassion. My complaint was of a wrong premise, not the wrong person. But the particular person is inseparable from the wrong premise, namely, a false generalization about religion, the field of her expertise, on which she repeatedly presents herself as a world authority. Yes, I see it as a sad mix.

5

SPARROW4 was looking for a discussion of "the pros and cons of her idea." If by Armstrong's "idea" you mean, stripped down, a world "charter" on compassion, I can't imagine any con. Of course I support the stripped down idea, but I can't support any program based on a false premise.

6

MOKEY2's impression of me is a wild misfit. But here's an ironic fact: accusing anybody of self-promotion automatically boomerangs in the public mind.

7

God seeks to bring good out of evil, better out of good, and best out of better. I thank all for their comments. I'll end this comment with the closing words of my entry (or "essay"): "we should all pray and work for world compassion, and be thankful for all efforts toward it. The world aches for it...."

POSTED BY: WILLIS E. ELLIOTT | NOVEMBER 17, 2008 2:24 PM REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT

Sparrow4,

You hit the nail on the head. This is a guy who seems to think that he is somehow 'qualified' to teach other people's belief systems just because some college hired him to do so. Never mind the fact that like anyone else, he cannot claim to have any understanding other than that which reinforces his 'own' belief system. This man has no business calling himself an 'educator'. I don't care how old he is or who he 'used to know' back in the day.

He holds up other people's beliefs to his congregation as examples of 'how others lose their way' without even bothering to have those people attend and take part in a discussion, leaving things purely one sided.

He's extraordinarily arrogant and self serving and most likely pissed off that he didn't think of this charter first, which leads him to accuse Ms. Armstrong of doing exactly what he does. Self Promotion.

POSTED BY: MOKEY2 | NOVEMBER 17, 2008 9:54 AM REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT

Mr. Elliot- it's very obvious you have a bone to pick with Armstrong. and you're very thin skinned. that's your problem. You posted your essay in a blog with a comment column- either you don't understand what that entails or you are just a very grouchy guy. In either case, i was looking for the pros and cons of her idea from people who are supposedly spiritual leaders or teachers. If your essay had been less obviously personally sniping and more informative, i would have gotten something from it.

I particularly thought your comments about those who are "inside" and "outside" religions was very enlightening. In a not-good, territorial, us-vs-them kind of way.

As it is, I repeat, you sound like someone with a bad case of sour grapes, not someone I would look up to for spiritual guidance. And your response to me just reinforces it.

POSTED BY: SPARROW4 | NOVEMBER 16, 2008 9:16 AM REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT

You don't really seem to disagree with the idea that we need to find ways to inspire more compassion, regardless of religion. It seems you think Karen Armstrong is the wrong person to lead such an effort.

What's your alternative? Do nothing but criticize? Submit some language for the charter and see if you can improve it-anyone can. Withhold judgment until you see what they actually come up with. So what if the starting premise is wrong if the final result is good?

POSTED BY: JLH6789 | NOVEMBER 16, 2008 8:49 AM REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT

TO SPARROW4

What I wrote can indeed be read as you read it, but it was not written in the spirit you attribute to it.

1

You did not comment on the truth factor: Armstrong's claim was a flat falsehood.

2

Armstrong's use of the word "religion" was not, as you claim, "quibbling over semantics." She knew exactly what she was doing from outside "the religions" (i.e., having no personal commitment to any religion): she was ripping off "religion" for her particular ethical project. We who are inside "the religions" don't appreciate being ripped off for non-religious purposes.

3

Eleanor Roosevelt promoted a project of mine, and we had correspondence. No self-promotion in her. I thought of her immediately when confronted with Armstrong's latest self-promo.

4

No free-speech issue. Of course Armstrong has "the right to comment" on anything (including "fundamentalisms"), no matter her personal commitments or projects. And the commented-to have the right to comment on her comments. But your comments seem relevant neither to her project nor to my comments on it and her.

5

I agree with you that "the better question is how should compassion function?" But calling for a "charter" on that basis would not have given her ego the opportunity for implicit self-presentation as a world-authority on religion.

POSTED BY: WILLIS E. ELLIOTT | NOVEMBER 15, 2008 10:15 PM REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT

I think the concept of compassion is found within religion, but has been pointed out, not always lived up to. And I would also extend this to include Humanism, Agnosticism and Atheism, which are not religions, but are still fatih systems, and guidelines in how a person lives out his life. Perhaps the better question is how should compassion function? It seems to mean different things to different religions and codes of living. Perhaps if we had a common understanding of how compassion works within such a diverse, often contentious world we would be better able to implement it.

Armstrong's use of the word "religion" is really quibbling over semantics. she uses it as a shorthand for what we all know is a huge, complex subject. Nitpicking seems a little childish. In fact you and several others seem to be taking potshots at her, rather than dealing with her statement. The comment she is not associated with any particular religion makes you seem snarky, not enlightened. Why should she need to be, in order to have the right to comment? Isn't this the same free speech issue religious folk have been whining about as being infringed upon when they are pushed back on bullying from the pulpits on abortion and gay rights?

What's wrong with wanting to take on the "fundamentalism" of religions? The fundamentalists, and the orthodox want to define the world in terms of themselves. They see little reason to accommodate, accept or respect religious differences, or beliefs. And NEVER mention you are atheistic or agnostic in their hearing.

I don't get the Eleanor Roosevelt comment. Eleanor Roosevelt happened to have been a great women, and inspiration to the country and in fact the world. How you go from source of to self-promotion because her name is now revealed makes no sense to me. Or if you are referring to Ms. Armstrong's project, I dunno- sounds like you have a bad case of sour grapes.

POSTED BY: SPARROW4 | NOVEMBER 15, 2008 6:16 PM REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT

'The notion that "compassion is central to all religions" is wishful thinking, not sound scholarship.'

Absolutely. Consider the Roman Church. Its centrality is rooted not in compassion but in authority and obedience.

POSTED BY: NORRIEHOYT | NOVEMBER 15, 2008 2:38 PM REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT

Dear Willis Elliot

I agree with you 100% on this one. A charter of compassion among the various religions is not practical because a number of religeous traditions do not practice or encourage compassion, despite what their hollow words or theologies might proclaim. This fact makes this charter simply impossible, in an ecumenical sense. Of course some people can throw something together, but it would be simply dismissed as another "lefty" plot by many conservative religious people.

I think that compassion, as with almost everything relating to Jesus and Christianity, is something to feel in your own heart, a sorrow for the suffering and trouble of another, to be felt and acted upon in the moment, on a personal level, everyday, and that cannot be felt as easily or as completely without tuning out all of the political motivations of religions; a charter of compassion conflicts with my sense of compassion. If you become bitter over the world, and all the injustices in it, and how can things come out so bad for so many good people, and how can the tsunami kill 250,000 people, if you dwell on such things unto bitterness against life and God, then it is not as easy to feel compassion, because such bitterness eats away at compassion, like acid.

POSTED BY: DANIELINTHELIONSDEN | NOVEMBER 12, 2008 4:35 PM REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT

The comments to this entry are closed.