

Title

Journal of BAHISEEN

Issue

Volume 03, Issue 01,
January-March 2025

ISSN

ISSN (Online): 2959-4758

ISSN (Print): 2959-474X

Frequency

Quarterly

Copyright ©

Year: 2025

Type: CC-BY-NC

Availability

Open Access

Website

ojs.bahiseen.com

Email

editor@bahiseen.com

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+923106606263

Publisher

BAHISEEN Institute for
Research & Digital
Transformation, Islamabad

Karen Armstrong's Perspective on Orientalism in Her Works About The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH)

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Abstract

Western scholars, often referred to as orientalists, have extensively written about the biography of the Prophet Muhammad. Much of this work originates from prejudiced medieval accounts produced during the time of the Crusades, which are inherently biased and hostile. Karen Armstrong critiques these views in various instances throughout her books, particularly those centered on the Prophet's life. This paper examines Karen's perspectives on Orientalism and highlights the emerging modern approaches to Islam and the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). It further evaluates Karen's efforts to bridge the gaps and make this world a peaceful place to live as she offers a balanced, in-depth portrait, revealing the person (Muhammad PBUH) at the heart of Islam by dismantling centuries of misconceptions. It offers a view of Muhammad PBUH the prophet as a sympathetic man whose exciting life helps one appreciate the significant and rich complexity of the Muslim tradition.

Keywords: Orientalism, the Prophet, hostile views, Islam, Karen Armstrong, Friendly voice, Quran, etc.

Introduction

Orientalists

The word "Orientalist" in its general sense, is being used for the Western scholar who studies the Orient or the East as a whole region. Their primary focus was the languages of the East which gradually grew to its art, civilization, literature, and religion. It is a known fact that Islam is the leading religion in the East and had competitive and hard-hitting relations with the West since the advent of Islam. Orientalists researched Muslims and Islam on a massive level and turned it into a movement that served imperial rule.

Meaning of the term Orientalist/Orientalism:

The term "Orientalist" is a noun for a person who studies the languages and culture of oriental countries.¹ According to the Oxford English Dictionary,² the word "Orientalism" has been used for the subject and the works of the Orientalists, scholars who are versed in the culture, histories, languages, and societies of Asia or the Orient".

The literal meaning of this word is to be in the direction to the east as it is mentioned in the World Book Encyclopedia: "Orient: O rih ent", is another name for Asiatic

countries and islands, or the East. The word comes from Latin and refers to the direction from which the sun rises.”³. The word “Orientalism” is considered opposite to “Occidentalism” and it is about the “study of Eastern culture, any trait associated with the people of East”.⁴ Therefore, the term “Orientalist” denotes a person who studies the languages and cultures of Eastern countries. “Orientalism” refers to the works of these scholars who specialize in the cultures, histories, and societies of Asia.

Emergence of this term in English:

This term emerged in the English Language in the seventeenth century and flourished during the eighteenth century. According to A.J. Arberry’s research, this term was used first for Samuel Clarke in 1691 AD⁵ because he was learning Eastern languages and literature, in particular Arabic Language.

We also find some other points of view of Edmund Burke iii, according to which the term “Orientalist flourished in Western scholarship from the eighteenth century to well into the twentieth century.”⁶ This point of view is also reiterated in the Encyclopedia of Islam: “The term Orientalist first occurred in English around 1779 and in French in 1799.”⁷ thus, it can be concluded that this term was devised in the 17th century and scholars were very much familiar with the term in the 18th century. This indicates that the term developed alongside European colonial interests in the East, reflecting both linguistic adoption and a growing Western appropriation of Eastern knowledge, often through a Eurocentric lens.

Equivalent/corresponding Term in Arabic Language: (الاستشراق والمستشرقون)

It is important to know that the corresponding and equivalent term to “Orientalism/Orientalist” in Arabic or its translation is “Al-Istashraq wal-mushrikoon” (الاستشراق والمستشرقون) and it emerged in the dictionaries compiled in the nineteenth century and not before it, and was included to the Arabic dictionary of French Academy in 1838 AD⁸ though Muslim scholars were familiar with this term even before it, thus Najeeb Al-Aqqi (نجيب العقي) recorded one thousand years of “Orientalists” and started with the French monk Gerbert D’Aurillac (938-1003 AD.) who went to Andalusia and studied at the hands of Muslim Scholars and became known and knowledgeable European scholar of Arabic Culture and its other fields of study.

This term mainly had its positive connotation until some scholars analyzed it deeply and revealed some critical information about orientalists and their intentions of studying about East, particularly about Islam. Edward Said says: “By Orientalist I mean several things, all of them, in my opinion interdependent. The most readily accepted designation for Orientalism is an academic institution anyone who teaches, writes about, or researches the orient-and this applies whether the person is an anthropologist, sociologist, historian, or philologist either in its specific or its general aspects, is an Orientalist, and what he or she does is Orientalism”⁹

Above mentioned discussion can be concluded that the “Orientalist” is a Western scholar who studies different aspects of Islam and Muslims, their belief system, sharia, culture and civilization, history, political system, and resources, etc. to seek specific objectives. The key objective is to demoralize Islam and prove the supremacy of the West and provide the necessary information to the West about the East so that they may prolong their rule over the East.

It is worth mentioning that some scholars think that those scholars who learned from Orientalists or were influenced by them and supported their stance should also be considered among Orientalists. Here “Ahmad Ghurab” (احمد غراب) emphasizes that

Western scholars who are none Muslims specifically are called the “Orientalists”.¹⁰ Though it is debatable, there are a number of scholars who only consider Western scholars to be Orientalists.

It is a matter of fact that this term is still in use and is sometimes replaced with area study specialists because the knowledge is expanding day by day, so specifications, specializations, and expertise are required to be more focused. Therefore, sometimes it is replaced with “Area Study Specialist” but the objectives are still the same to serve the imperial rule or West. After the whole discussion, it can be said that orientalist/orientalism has its stated and hidden objectives, some of which have been identified mainly by Muslim critics and some are still undermined and need to be explored and analyzed.

As Gilbert D Nugent says “It is safe to speak evil of one whose malignity exceeds whatever ill can be spoken”¹¹ It is mentioned in the Jewish Encyclopedia... he became convinced that he had been chosen as an Arab Prophet”.¹² They tried to associate Islam and its practices with Judaic traditions. They claimed that the Muslims follow the early Judah tradition and Muslims celebrate Jumma as a holy day as they celebrate the Sabbath. According to their opinion, when Muslims did not receive a positive response from Jews, they changed their Qibla. Jews further claim that when Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) realized that his hopes would not be fulfilled he changed some of his new rites and adopted a hostile attitude towards the Jews of Madinah who gradually were either annihilated or expelled.¹³

I think that the definition of Orientalists remains a subject of debate, with some scholars extending the term to include those influenced by Western thought, while others restrict it to non-Muslim Western scholars. Despite evolving terminology, the objectives of Orientalism remain largely unchanged, often serving Western interests. Orientalist narratives have historically sought to link Islam to Judaic and Christian traditions, presenting biased interpretations of historical events. These perspectives, as highlighted in various sources, reinforce the need for continued scholarly critique and deeper analysis of the underlying motives and implications of Orientalist discourse. Karen Armstrong is a leading Western scholar who reveals some of the erroneous information about Islam.

Approaches to Orientalism:

There could be two possible approaches:

- (1) To keep analyzing the work of orientalists and point out their hostile views and react whenever they point to Islam, Quran, and Muslims polemically.
- (2) To engage the orientalists who are unbiased scholars and study Islam and Muslims with impartiality.

While the first approach has its own value and importance, I believe that the second approach would be more effective for engaging those who are open to understanding the Quran and Muslim heritage, such as John Esposito and Karen Armstrong. These scholars have written academically about the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), the Quran, Islam, and the Muslim community. The second approach is more suitable for contemporary discourse, as it is proactive and can help normalize any hostile views toward Islam. Additionally, it encourages further academic and objective research about the Quran and the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). Engaging with such friendly and scholarly voices is crucial, as their work is read by both English-speaking Muslims and non-Muslims alike. We need to assess the evolution of various approaches as neo-Orientalism emerges¹⁴, highlighting both positive developments and ongoing divisions. It is important to examine

how traditional Orientalist ideas have changed and propose new perspectives on identity, global ethics, and civil society. This can help create a more connected and equitable world. Karen is one of those balanced and unbiased voices.

Karen's Life Overview/Sketch:

Karen Armstrong was born on November 14, 1944, in Worcestershire, England, into a family of Irish ancestry.¹⁵ At the age of 17, she joined the Sisters of the Holy Child Jesus, a religious order, where she spent seven years facing both physical and psychological hardships. After seven years in the convent, she emerged as a nonbeliever, and she recounted her journey in the autobiographical *Through the Narrow Gate* written and published in 1981.¹⁶

After leaving the convent in 1969, she studied English at Oxford but eventually abandoned her academic career after failing her dissertation. During this period, she struggled with undiagnosed temporal lobe epilepsy. Karen later became a well-known writer and commentator on religion. She remains unmarried and has shared her experiences in her memoir, *The Spiral Staircase*.

As a British author and former nun, Karen Armstrong is recognized for her work on comparative religion, particularly her focus on the shared values among different faiths. After leaving the convent, she pursued a career as a writer and broadcaster, producing influential books such as "A History of God" and "The Great Transformation" and other books.¹⁷ Her work examines the evolution of major religions and emphasizes compassion as a fundamental principle. In 2008, she received the TED Prize and launched the Charter for Compassion, which encourages global unity through empathy. Armstrong has also contributed to documentaries, participated in international forums, and has received numerous awards for her contributions to interfaith dialogue.

Throughout her career, Karen Armstrong has been honored for her efforts in promoting religious understanding and compassion. In 1999, she received the Muslim Public Affairs Council's Media Award. She has been recognized with honorary degrees from institutions such as Aston University, Queen's University, and the University of St Andrews. In 2013, she was awarded the Nayef Al-Rodhan Prize for Global Cultural Understanding.¹⁸ Her dedication to highlighting the commonalities between religions has earned her international recognition, including the Princess of Asturias Award in 2017. She has written three books on her life experiences:¹⁹

1. *Through The Narrow Gate* 1981.
2. *Beginning of the world*, 1983.
3. *The Spiral Staircase: A Memoir*. 2004.

Her Belief System:

I consider her fortunate because many people feel a sense of connection with her. While some Western scholars label her a *Dhimmit*,²⁰ a few Muslim scholars mistakenly assume she is Muslim. Christians categorize her as one of their own, while Western liberals often refer to her as a "runaway nun"²¹ among other titles. However, she identifies herself as a "freelance monotheist." As she describes herself in her book: "I am no longer a practicing Roman Catholic, but I usually call myself, slightly tongue in cheek, a "freelance monotheist,"

At present, I draw sustenance from other traditions as well as from Western Christianity."²²

She is perceived differently across various groups, reflecting the complexity of her religious identity. While some label her based on their own perspectives, she defines

herself as a "freelance monotheist," drawing inspiration from multiple traditions. Her admiration for Buddhist teachings, particularly their emphasis on mindfulness and compassion, further highlights her all-embracing spiritual approach. There is another interesting fact about her that AI (ChatGPT) often in response to certain prompts, portrayed her as an expert and interpreter of the Quran which is not true.²³

Her Perspective of Orientalism:

(Religion Islam, Prophet Muhammad PBUH, Quran, Civilization and Culture, etc.)

Karen Armstrong highlights the historical bias and misconceptions propagated by Orientalists and Western societies against Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). She effectively illustrates how political and religious tensions, rather than genuine understanding, shaped these perspectives.

Views on western understanding of Islam and Muslims in Medieval Times:

She connects medieval events with modern instances of misrepresentation of religion, such as the condemnation of the "Talmud" which was considered an attack on the person of Christ during King Louis IX of France's era²⁴ who commanded to burn it. He was intolerant and hostile towards the Jewish Talmud as a canonized saint of the Roman Catholic.²⁵ Karen rightly points out that it was not Islam but the Christian West which was so intolerant and hostile to other faiths during King Louis's era²⁶. He was also a Muslim hater and led two crusades against the Muslims²⁷, Karen rightly pointed out this historical fact.

While this historical linkage is insightful, she largely attributes the hostility to political motives, the role of theological ignorance, or fear of the unknown in shaping these views. This simplification might overlook more complex sociocultural factors contributing to such polemic depictions of Islam and Muslims.

View on Muslim Societies and Historical Facts:

Karen highlights moments of coexistence, such as in Cordova, where Christian-Muslim relations were positive, before noting the sudden turn to hostility due to some Christian clergymen like Paul Alvaro. She presents a critique of their attitudes, exploring historical instances where Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) was vilified by figures such as Paul Alvaro²⁸ and broader Western societies. She highlights how political and cultural biases led to misinterpretations of Islam, as seen in the portrayal of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) as a threat to Christian values²⁹.

Karen's account of incidents like the execution of Perfectus³⁰ and the broader conflict in Cordova illustrates the deep-rooted hostility towards Muslims. While she acknowledges the Qadi's attempts to balance justice under Islamic law, she could have expanded on how these legal principles reflected a more compassionate view of coexistence compared to the rigid intolerance often propagated by Orientalists³¹. Finally, she contrasts the openness of Islamic societies towards religious diversity with the closed-mindedness of certain Christian factions.³²

Karen highlights how Orientalists and Christian commentators often viewed Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) through a distorted lens shaped by cultural and political agendas. She critiques their portrayal of him as a threat to Western values and accuses them of misusing historical narratives to justify conflict. However, her analysis focuses heavily on their biases and leaves little room for acknowledging any attempts at objective scholarship by Orientalists, which might weaken her argument's depth in some scholars' views.

Religious Biases/Manipulation and Western View of the Holy Prophet (PBUH):

Karen effectively critiques the use of religious and cultural differences to highlight hostility toward Islam, as seen in her discussion of the “martyrs in Cordova”³³. She argues that a fear of Islamic influence and loss of cultural dominance shaped this narrative.

She also contrasts and compares Islamic Spain's relatively harmonious coexistence with the West's confrontational and adversarial approach, presenting a clear imbalance. While this critique is valid in highlighting hypocrisy or double standards of the West. In one's view, it could have been strengthened by examining the levels of coexistence and how different Islamic rulers and laws executed their citizens and approached non-Muslims in varying ways in the past³⁴.

Additionally, Karen points out the inaccuracies in the Western biography of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), which miscalculated his timeline and linked it to the symbolic number 666. This highlights the deliberate fabrication or misunderstanding in Western accounts.

Karen Armstrong provides a compelling critique of how Western narratives about Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) evolved into deep-rooted myths, shaped by fear, theological bias, and political rivalry. She illustrates how figures like Eulogio³⁵ drew on distorted and apocalyptic interpretations to demonize Islam and its Prophet, painting him as a false prophet driven by greed and violence. This narrative, Karen argues, was not rooted in factual knowledge but emerged from a fear-ridden imagination, where Islam's rapid success was seen as a divine punishment or existential threat to Christianity³⁶.

While Karen effectively highlights the misconceptions and deliberate distortions, her analysis could benefit from a deeper exploration of the broader intellectual environment in medieval Europe. The theological anxieties and limited access to authentic sources about Islam significantly influenced these narratives. Furthermore, Karen Armstrong draws attention to how these myths in the medieval West persisted for centuries, influencing Western perceptions of Islam even after more objective studies emerged. Her critique of the enduring "Mahound"³⁷ myth is sharp and timely, underscoring how popular narratives often overshadow scholarly efforts. She analyzes how Orientalists and Western scholars historically portrayed the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and Islam polemically.

She further, highlights the shift in European attitudes during the Crusades, moving from ignorance to deliberate vilification. Initially, the Western imagination was indiscriminate and titled Muslims with pagan idolaters, driven more by ignorance and misconceptions than by studied opposition. Works like *The Song of Roland*³⁸ demonstrated a superficial understanding of Islam, reducing it to a mythic and distorted caricature and discretion, in Karen's views.

She also points out the role of myths and fabricated narratives in framing the Prophet (PBUH). Western legends portrayed him as a magician, heretic, or impostor who attracted followers through deception and indulgence. (العياذ بالله) These narratives were deeply influenced by Christian anxieties about their own identity and reflected the psychological projection of Western fears and frustrations regarding Islam, in Karen's observation. The aggressive Christian militarism of the Crusades stood in contrast to the pacifist teachings of Jesus, creating cognitive dissonance, inconsistent and contradicting ideas that the West tagged Islam as "the religion of the sword."³⁹

Despite these hostilities, Karen points out that some Europeans attempted to adopt a more balanced view of Islam. For example, William of Malmesbury and Peter the Venerable made an effort to engage with Islamic texts and teachings. However, even their efforts were contaminated and tainted by the widespread myths of the time, reflecting the schizophrenic nature of Western attitudes—wavering between admiration and hatred.

Overall, Karen's evaluation suggests that the Western depiction of Muhammad (PBUH) and Islam was not rooted in genuine inquiry but in cultural anxieties, religious prejudice, and the political pressures of the Crusades. Karen critiques the long-standing Western perspective on Muhammad and Islam, emphasizing that despite attempts to present a more balanced or objective view, traditional prejudices persist. The narrative explores how many Western scholars, even during the Renaissance and Enlightenment, continued to spread negative stereotypes about Islam and its Prophet, often relying on medieval myths and misinterpretations. Whereas some scholars try to engage with the Muslim world comparatively more fairly, such as John of Segovia and François Voltaire.

Karen particularly highlights how even seemingly enlightened thinkers like Humphry Prideaux and Voltaire, while attempting a more rational critique, still echoed old prejudices, depicting Muhammad as a lustful, power-hungry figure (العياذ بالله). She emphasizes that these views, though framed within the intellectual context of their time, failed to recognize the true religious and cultural significance of Islam for its followers. Even scholars who aimed for more accurate depictions often fell into the trap of seeing Islam through a Christian lens or Western civilization lens, thus undermining any objective and deeper understanding of Islam. She mentions that these attitudes, rooted in historical conflicts like the Crusades, shaped the Western imaginative and hostile views of Islam, making it difficult for them to engage with the faith on its terms.

Western view of the Holy Quran:

She further narrates how early European reactions were characterized by a lack of genuine understanding of Islam and its divine book Quran. For instance, the reference to an "Arabian" who could appreciate the beauty of the Qur'an contrasts with the Western reader who, according to Karen, cannot grasp its deeper meanings, instead labeling it as a disjointed "rhapsody of fable and precept."⁴⁰

She evaluates Thomas Carlyle's approach in 1841⁴¹, acknowledging his attempt to humanize Muhammad by recognizing his genuine religiosity for the first time in Europe, yet still dismissing the Qur'an itself as a "wearisome, confused jumble" (العياذ بالله). This reveals a pattern of European intellectuals trying to appreciate Muhammad's character but still maintaining a narrow and dismissive view of Islamic texts, especially the Holy Quran.

She also references Napoleon's⁴² 1798 Egyptian campaign⁴³, illustrating the opportunistic nature of European engagement with Islam. While Napoleon's think tank and scholars made an effort to understand Islam to serve political ends, the incident emphasizes how even this understanding was, at best, superficial and driven by concealed motives, such as undermining British power and advancing French interests in the region. In Karen's views, this highlights the ongoing Eurocentric tendency to approach Islam with a mix of self-interest, and intellectual arrogance.

Critic on Colonial Mindset:

In the 19th century, the colonial mindset was negatively painting Islam and its adherents. Karen suggests that European superiority complexes, fuelled by colonialism,

led to a biased and distorted understanding of Islam. Western powers, particularly the French and the British, viewed the declining Ottoman Empire as a target for expansion and saw the mission of 'civilizing' Asia and Africa as part of their colonial agenda. The idea of a "mission civilisatrice" was used to justify intervention, and Islam was often portrayed as a barrier to progress, civilization, and freedom, particularly in works like that of François René de Chateaubriand⁴⁴. In Karen's opinion, Chateaubriand's view reflects the Orientalist tendency to frame Islam as a primitive force as compared to the 'superior' Christian civilization and showed Islam as inferior to Western civilization. He depicted the Muslims especially Arabs as disorganized and incapable of self-governance, which reinforced the idea that the West was meant to control and civilize them. Islam, in his eyes, lacked the principles of liberty found in Christianity.

According to Karen, "In his bestseller *Journey from Paris to Jerusalem and from Jerusalem to Paris* (1810-11), Chateaubriand applied his Crusading fantasy to the situation in Palestine. The Arabs, he wrote, "have the air of soldiers without a leader, citizens without legislators, and a family without a father" and unlike Christianity, 'Islam' preaches 'neither hatred of tyranny nor love of liberty.'" It is not so correct in Karen's views.⁴⁵

Karen views the Orientalist perspectives of this era as deeply rooted in colonialism, racial superiority, and imperialistic justifications. These views shaped a narrative that portrayed Islam and its followers as inferior, incapable of self-rule, and in need of Western intervention for their advancement. She critiques the Orientalist views from both a historical and contemporary perspective, highlighting the deep-rooted racism, colonial attitudes, and stereotypes about Islam and its followers.

She draws attention to how the colonial powers, such as Britain and France, justified their control over Muslim lands by portraying the Muslims as incapable of self-rule and in need of Western guidance. This was evident in figures like Lord Cromer, who dismissed the potential for Islamic reform and painted Arabs as inherently childlike and irrational. Similarly, Sir Alfred Lyall's quote highlights a view of the "Oriental" as illogical and unreasoning, further cementing the stereotype of Muslims as inferior to the rational, logical West.⁴⁶

Additionally, she notes the cultural clash between the Western perception of Islam and the reality of the religion and its history. The continued hostile attitudes toward Islam, even after the colonial period, are seen in modern stereotypes, such as the image of the oil sheikh or the fanatic. She also points out that not all Western scholars align with this hostile perspective. For instance, Louis Massignon and Wilfred Cantwell Smith are highlighted as examples of those who have tried to deepen Western understanding of Islam and challenge the prejudices of their time. These scholars, through a more empathetic study of Islam, have recognized the spiritual richness of the religion and its contribution to the welfare of Muslims⁴⁷.

Karen advocates Islamic teachings from another misunderstood concept of Jihad, she analyzes and writes: "Muhammad was not a pacifist". He believed that warfare was sometimes inevitable and even necessary. After the battle of Badr, the Muslims knew that it was only a matter of time before Mecca took her revenge, and they dedicated themselves to a long, grueling jihad. But the primary meaning of that word, which we hear so often today, is not "holy war" but the "effort" or "struggle" necessary to put the will of God into practice. Muslims are exhorted to strive in this endeavor on all fronts: intellectual, social, economic, spiritual, and domestic. Sometimes, they would have to fight, but this was not their chief duty.

She further referred to the battle of Badr and said, “On their way home from Badr, Muhammad uttered an important and oft-quoted maxim: “We are returning from the Lesser Jihad (the battle) and going to the Greater Jihad,” that is a more important and difficult struggle to reform their own society and their own hearts”.⁴⁸

In conclusion, her perspective on Orientalist views is largely critical, condemning the racial and imperialist roots of these views, while acknowledging that some scholars have attempted a more objective and respectful understanding of Islam. Karen’s critique of Orientalism is a call to abandon the deep biases that have shaped Western views of Islam and to approach the religion and its followers with greater respect, empathy, and understanding. She urges a shift in perspective, advocating for the recognition of Islam as a rich, diverse tradition with a profound impact on civilization, rather than as a crude, barbaric enemy of the West.

Is Karen Armstrong a Friendly Voice for Muslims?

Though she writes from a Western-centric Perspective and misrepresentations of Islam in Western discourse, largely for a Western audience, her interpretations are often filtered through the lens of Western scholarship and history. This approach is often constructive, it may not fully escape the constraints of Western bias, even when it seeks to moderate it. Still, she has been able to present balanced views and I consider her a friendly voice in the West, unlike the typical orientalists.

Karen offers a sympathetic and corrective voice in her portrayal of Islam. She counters stereotypes and debunks the myth that Islam is inherently violent or backward. Through her writing, she provides a space for Muslims to be seen in a more humanizing light—rather than as the "enemy" or "other" that much of the Western discourse has painted them as.

She emphasizes the deep contributions Islam has made to global civilization, while also acknowledging the challenges and conflicts within both Western and Muslim societies. This kind of balanced representation is a step toward reconciling past misunderstandings and bridging the communities.

In conclusion, Karen Armstrong is undoubtedly a friendly voice for Muslims in many respects. She challenges harmful stereotypes, highlights the humanity and dignity of Muslims, and promotes a more balanced view of Islam. By encouraging interfaith dialogue, correcting historical misrepresentations, and calling for mutual respect, she lays the groundwork for better understanding. She had given the message to Muslims in particular Pakistani Community to “Practice the Charter For Compassion and Spread it”⁴⁹

She rightly suggests East and West by quoting Wilfred Cantwell Smith: “Islam had for centuries helped Muslims cultivate decent values” which we in the West share because they spring from a common tradition. Some Muslims have problems with Western modernity. They have turned against the cultures of the People of the Book, and have even begun to Islamize their new hatred of these sister faiths, which were so powerfully endorsed by the Qur’an. Cantwell Smith further argued that if they are to meet the challenge of the day, Muslims must learn to understand our Western traditions and institutions because they are not going to disappear. If Islamic societies did not do this, he maintained, they would fail the test of the twentieth century. But he pointed out that Western people also have a problem: “an inability to recognize that they share the planet not with inferiors but with equals.”⁵⁰

I would recommend that Muslim scholars take a proactive stance in addressing and countering hostile perceptions of Islam, rather than simply reacting to them. By actively

engaging in dialogue with Western scholars who hold a positive and unbiased understanding of Islam, they can help to eliminate and dispel misconceptions and foster a deeper appreciation for the faith. This collaborative effort could pave the way for greater understanding and tolerance, ultimately contributing to a more harmonious and peaceful world for all. I suggest that Muslim scholars be proactive rather than reactive to hostile views. They should engage with Western scholars who have a positive approach to Islam like Karen, to eliminate misunderstandings and contribute to making this world a more peaceful place to live.

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- ¹⁸ <https://www.penguinrandomhouse.com/authors/834/karen-armstrong/>
 - <https://contactout.com/karen-armstrong-email-31294>
- ¹⁹ see details in the intro of her autobiography “The Spiral Staircase” of these books as she states about her book “Beginning of the World” as her worst book. (The Spiral the Staircase, p 12)
 - <https://www.encyclopedia.com/arts/educational-magazines/armstrong-karen-1944>
- ²⁰ see details: <https://islam-watch.org/authors/59-kammuna/197-dhimwit-karen-armstrong-nakhla-raid.html#!/ccomment-comment=3087>
- ²¹ see details: <https://islam-watch.org/authors/59-kammuna/197-dhimwit-karen-armstrong-nakhla-raid.html#!/ccomment-comment=3087>
- ²¹ http://www.arabphilosophers.com/English/discourse/east-west/Islma_and_West/Armstrong_Islam_and_West.htm
 - <https://www.encyclopedia.com/arts/educational-magazines/armstrong-karen-1944>
 - http://brothersjudd.com/index.cfm/fuseaction/reviews.detail/book_id/411/Islam:%20A%20Sho.htm
- Profile of Karen Armstrong : Mary Rourke meets the author of "Islam, a short history" (Los Angeles Times, October 9, 2000)
- ²² *Through the Narrow Gate*, p. xvi.
 - ²³ see details: Dr. Atiq-ur-Rehman. (2024). Prospects of Effective Use of AI (ChatGPT) in Academic Settings Especially in Religious Education. *Al-Mithaq (Research Journal of Islamic Theology)*, 3(02), 21–35. Retrieved from <https://almithaqjournal.org/index.php/home/article/view/157>, page 29.
- ²⁴ Louis IX: <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Louis-IX>
 - King of France, son of Louis VIII and Blanche of Castile, born at Poissy, 25 April 1215; died near Tunis, 25 August 1270. <https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/09368a.htm>
- ²⁵ Muhammad: A Biography of the Prophet, p21 (the title of this book in first editions was mentioned as “Muhammad: A Western Attempt to Understand Islam”).
- ²⁶ Muhammad: A Biography of the Prophet, p21
- ²⁷ See details regarding Louis IX and the crusades:
 - <https://www.britannica.com/event/Crusades/The-First-Crusade-and-the-establishment-of-the-Latin-states>

- ²⁸ Paul Albar (d. 861), also known as Paulus Alvarus, was a contemporary of and lay apologist for the mid-ninth-century martyrs of Córdoba. Historians know him for his works on the martyrs and for his theological tract, the *Indiculus Luminosus*. The details of Albar's life remain obscure. - <https://medievalsourcesbibliography.org/authors.php?id=1482>
- *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 1923, Vol. 43 (1923), pp. 1-14
 - <https://referenceworks.brill.com/display/db/cmro>
- ²⁹ Ibid 22.
- ³⁰ Read the detailed story of his execution: "The Life of Priest-Martyr Perfectus of Cordoba":
- <https://kalebatlantaprime.medium.com/the-life-of-priest-martyr-perfectus-of-cordoba-2a5dbe847879>
 - This story is illustrated in a picture as well. I avoid to mention the ill language "Perfectus" used for the Holy Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). One can read through the given citations.
- ³¹ Muhammad: A Biography of the Prophet, p 21.
- ³² See details: *ibid* pp 19-24
- ³³ See also:
- <https://kalebatlantaprime.medium.com/the-life-of-priest-martyr-perfectus-of-cordoba-2a5dbe847879>
- ³⁴ as such cases (Islamic law), in Muslims' perspective Perfectus and others were brought to justice for their blasphemy and in Christians' views, they were martyrs of Cordova.
- ³⁵ It is not certain on what date or in what year of the ninth century he was born; it must have been previous to 819, because in 848 he was a priest highly esteemed among the Christians of Catalonia and Navarre, and priesthood was then conferred only on men thirty years of age.
- St. Eulogius of Cordova. In *The Catholic Encyclopedia*. New York: Robert Appleton Company. <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/05604a.htm>
- ³⁶ Muhammad: A Biography of the Prophet, pp 23-24
- ³⁷ *Ibid* p. 25 (in notes on page 267 she gives the references from the Holy Bible in support of her stance that Christian clergymen wrongly referred to the Holy verses to support their point of view to demonize the Muslims, Islam, and Muhammad PBUH.
- ³⁸ Muhammad: A Biography of the Prophet, p 25
- See details *La Chanson de Roland* Old French epic poem that is probably the earliest (c. 1100): <https://www.britannica.com/topic/La-Chanson-de-Roland>
 - https://www.yorku.ca/inpar/roland_crosland.pdf
- ³⁹ Muhammad: A Biography of the Prophet, p 25-26.
- ⁴⁰ See details:
- The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, ed. Dero E. Saunders, abridged in one volume (London, 1980), pp. 657-8.
- Muhammad the Enemy Karen Armstrong Page 37,38
- Thomas Carlyle (born December 4, 1795, Ecclefechan, Dumfriesshire, Scotland—died February 5, 1881, London, England) was a Scottish historian and essayist, whose major works include *The French Revolution*, 3 vol. (1837), *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History* (1841), in which he discussed the hero as divinity as prophet Muhammad PBUH.
- <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Thomas-Carlyle>
- (born August 15, 1769, Ajaccio, Corsica—died May 5, 1821, St. Helena Island) was a French general, first consul (1799–1804), and emperor of the French (1804–1814/15), one of the most celebrated personages in the history of the West.
- <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Napoleon-I>
- ⁴³ Battle of Nile: <https://www.britannica.com/event/Battle-of-the-Nile>
- ⁴⁴ François-Auguste-René, vicomte de Chateaubriand (born Sept. 4, 1768, Saint-Malo, France—died July 4, 1848, Paris) was a French author and diplomat, one of his country's first Romantic writers. Written a prose epic about early Christian martyrs in Rome.

- <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Francois-Auguste-Rene-vicomte-de-Chateaubriand>
- ⁴⁵ Muhammad A Biography of A Prophet, p 39
- See also in Edward Said's "Orientalism". He has also referred to this in detail. p 170 -175. Orientalism, Edward S Said, Vintage Books A Division of Random House New York, Ed. 1978, p171.

⁴⁶ See details: Muhammad A Biography of the Prophet, pp 40-41

⁴⁷ See details: Muhammad A Biography of the Prophet, p 43-44.

List of famous books by Karen Armstrong:

Armstrong Karen Muhammad (Prophet for Our Time) Harper Perennial), London, 2006.

Note: I have reviewed several accounts about Karen and could not find this book on the list; perhaps its title resonates more with the Muslim community.

Armstrong Karen Muhammad: A Western Attempt to Understand Islam; Victor Gollans, London, 1991.

Armstrong Karen Muhammad; A Biography of Prophet, Muhammad Prophet for our time. Holy War, Islam a Short History; History of God.

Armstrong Karen, Through the Narrow Gate, P XVI Flamingo, Harper Collins Publishers, London, 1995.

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- Karen Armstrong Delivers a lecture in 2007 New English Review: www.newcnglishreview.org retrieved on 26-12-16;

- Reuters: (Karen Armstrong on Pakistan) blogs.

- Talks Karen Armstrong: 2008 TED Prize Wish: "Charter for Compassion",

See details: <https://www.thenews.com.pk/archive/print/93803> ;

<https://tricycle.org/magazine/freelance-monotheist/>

John Esposito's work on Islamophobia and the future of Islam is also worthwhile to mention.

See also: <https://gufaculty360.georgetown.edu/s/contact/00336000014RbJ4AAK/john-esposito>

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⁴⁸ Muhammad Prophet For our Time, p. 137.

⁴⁹ Glimpses from Karen's Interview and her message for Muslims:

	<p><i>Practice the Charter for Compassion and spread it</i></p> <p><i>Karen Armstrong</i></p>	<p>The interview took place at FCCU in Lahore on February 4, 2011. During the interview, she wrote a message by hand: "Practice the Charter for Compassion and spread it." She shared her thoughts on "Orientalism," as discussed in her book "Muhammad: A Biography of the Prophet," in response to the question about Orientalists. Interviewer: Atiq-ur-Rehman</p>
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I had the privilege of interviewing Karen Armstrong in 2011 at FCCU Lahore, during which she shared her heartfelt commitment by saying, "I am working for my people." This resonated deeply with me, emphasizing the vital role that Muslims play in cultivating community connections and engaging in meaningful dialogue to foster understanding among diverse perspectives. It's crucial for Muslim scholars to collaborate with Western scholars in order to bridge gaps and clarify misunderstandings between communities.

Karen's work, including "Letter to Pakistan" and her proposal for a "Charter for Compassionate Life," highlights her dedication to healing divisions. Today, she lives what she describes as 'freelance monotheism,' reflecting her journey of compassion and understanding in a complex world with diverse religious communities.

- Read also (She was given a coverage in National Media especially in print media):

- <https://www.dawn.com/news/1105214>
- <https://www.dawn.com/news/1437301>
- <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/372646-the-world-stands-in-dire-need-of-compassion-karen-armstrong>
- <https://www.nation.com.pk/E-Paper/lahore/2024-07-11/page-13/detail-0>
- https://www.aku.edu/news/Pages/News_Details.aspx?nid=NEWS-000567

⁵⁰ Muhammad Prophet For our Time, p. 213.

See also as Kern gives its reference: Smith, Wilfred Cantwell, "Islam in Modern History", Princeton and London. 1957, unless Western civilization intellectually and socially, politically and economically, and the Christian church, theologically, can learn to treat other men with fundamental respect, these two in their turn will have failed to come to terms with the actualities of the twentieth century. The problems raised in this era are, as profound as anything that we have touched on for Islam". Page, 305).

- Note of Thanks: I would like to express my gratitude to Dr. Daniel Lanz, Assistant Professor of Religious Studies at FCCU, for his invaluable feedback on this paper and his insights regarding future research endeavors.