

## Talk on *Paris Under Siege*

Madame et Messieurs

I wish to express my thanks to Mimi and all of you for allowing me the opportunity to speak today. I should tell you a few details of my background. I grew up in Oakland, California without a hint of any religious expression but at Stanford University I took religion courses, attended an Episcopal Church nearby and was baptized at 20 years of age. I decided I did not want to be a lawyer but an Episcopal priest and drove my 1947 Chevrolet to Austin, Texas, where I attended the Episcopal Seminary of the Southwest, and also met Elsie while she was at the University of Texas.

After ordination in San Francisco in 1959 the bishop sent me to the Salinas Valley, where we spent more than seven years. Salinas was the home of the author John Steinbeck. There I was

also an Army Reserve Chaplain as well as part- time chaplain at Soledad Prison, along with Vicar of two churches I was assigned to by the bishop. I returned to Stanford on the side to earn a MA in Hispanic American Studies.

Our next move was to suburban St Louis, Missouri, but after six years in 1972 we moved to New York City where I became Rector of the Church of the Epiphany at E74th and York Avenues on the upper Eastside. I earned a doctorate at Princeton Seminary on the side and published my first book called Sermon Struggles. We moved back to Texas in 1988 to become dean of St, Matthew's Cathedral with the largest Latino congregation in the Episcopal Church, then on to France in 1992 as dean of the American Cathedral of the Holy Trinity on Avenue George V, near the hotel of the same name. This is an Anglican or Episcopal Cathedral with the tallest church spire in Paris and was built in 1886. Have any of you visited this church, which serves all denominations in Paris?

I had four purposes in mind when I wrote *Paris Under Siege*. First of all, I wanted the book to be a page turner, an exciting thriller where the reader gets caught up in the narrative and each of the characters and enjoys oneself in the process. Personally, I like nothing better than to lose myself in an interesting and informative book. When I attended the Naples' Press Club's conference on writing three years I discovered that everyone had a manuscript but me so I decided to do something about it, and started one day writing, and correcting, and editing. Of course twenty years ago I wrote a book which was academic and that was published, and over the years I am written many articles and essays, but never pure fiction. When rewriting several drafts I showed them to my 98 year old Texas father in law, and he suggested "more action." My New York son, of an entirely different age and milieu, suggested, "more love scenes," and my wife, a teacher, merely said, "clean up your grammar."

Secondly, I wanted to help the reader to know more about the Muslim religion and its relation to those of us of different faiths; it

is said that 85% of Americans, especially, claim religious affiliation but that only a minority know much about their faith.

For example I heard a speaker on PBS cite examples of the lack of religious knowledge. When asked who was Noah's wife? One grown man replied "Joan of Ark." I suppose our ignorance may be little like the phrase in French, "I believe but I don't practice."

Thirdly, I wanted to assist the reader to know more about Paris and France and its relationship to Muslims, and fourthly to help people appreciate the American institutions in Paris, such as the American cathedral, the American church, the school, library, university and hospital and to remind readers of the historic relationship between the U.S. and France.

I assume that many of you know members of the Muslim faith, that you have Muslim friends, and that you have lived in or visited Muslim countries. Elsie and I spent some time in Istanbul and loved it and Elsie has traveled in Eastern Europe in several mainly Muslim dominated areas; and of course we have lived in Paris for more than ten years. It is my belief that since 9/11 each of us needs

to know more about the 2 Billion or so Muslims in the world.

Algerian born French philosopher—some say existentialist, but he

denied that he was-- Albert Camus, a hero of mine, once wrote:

“the most loathsome materialism is not the kind people usually

think of, but the sort that attempts to let dead ideas pass for living

realities.” It is therefore my hypothesis that we have some pretty

dead ideas about Muslims in general and that we need to possess

new understandings about them as the global world grows smaller,

remembering that God is no respecter of persons, as Peter said in

Luke’s Book of Acts, but those anywhere who are good and decent

are accepted by Him.

One way I hoped to promote a better understanding of the

Muslim faith by everyday readers was through the relationship in

the book of Charles Edward Winthrop III, a New Yorker, and

Fatima el Yousseff, an Egyptian flight attendant, who takes her

faith seriously as it sustains her when she is captured by Aboud, a

disaffected Algerian who can not forget the horror of the Algerian

war from 1954 to 1962. Fatima is not a feminist exactly in a

Western sense of the word but she would be in terms of her own background and faith. She is intelligent and attractive, attended a University, but her enslavement came when there was a real and terrible pogrom against single women in 2001 in Hassi Messaoud, the largest oil town in Algeria, where women found jobs as beauticians and household help on their own, supporting families in Algiers. An Islamist fundamentalist Mullah preached that they were all prostitutes because they had no “wali,” that is a male protector, and his ill informed words unleashed mob riots which killed, raped and tortured over three hundred women. This is a documented fact. I write that my heroine was accidentally caught up in this melee because she had flown there and had a flight lay over. She was saved by the tyrant Aboud, who I say in the book was one of the instigators of the riot because he and his family were members of the FIS, the Islamic Salvation Front, whose aim was to rid Algeria of all Western influences. You may remember the other killings about ten years ago that occurred in Algeria before the FIS was exiled by the government.

Of course Aboud pressures her into service to him, but when Charles, who is seeking to find out information from Aboud concerning his terrorist ambitions in Paris, is held hostage in Aboud's desert villa and questioned about his undercover US government connections, Fatima rescues him by arranging an escape across the desert by camel. In their relationship they question each other about their own faith and she instructs him about the Muslim religion that has sustained her in captivity. She teaches him of the five pillars of the Muslim religion. They are prayer, or *salat*; the confession of faith in One God and of Mohammed as his prophet called *shahadah*; charitable giving, *zakat*; fasting on Ramadan and on other occasions, called *siyam*; and the pilgrimage to Mecca, the *hajj*.

She often chides him, however, when he seems downhearted about his severe injuries and suggests he practice his own faith. They consequently debate fate and free will, kismet and freedom of choice. For example, on pages 176 and 177 Charles says that they must be prepared for the worse because Aboud is planning

terrible destructions by the use of rockets and c-4 explosions, and she says: “You are right, Charlie, because we do not know what will happen, and that’s why we pray. The Koran has room for our quandaries. I remember one favorite passage Fayet (who was the keeper of camels and who befriended her in the desert) always quoted to me. ‘Fighting may be ahead, although it be hated by you. Yet it may happen that you will hate a thing which is better for you; and it may happen that you will love a thing which is worse for you: God knows and you do not.’

Charles responds: “That is sure on target. I did not want to fight but I had to defend us in the desert. I like that phrase, ‘God knows and I do not’ but to tell you the truth, I wish I did know what’s going to happen. That makes me think of the phrase you use often, Fatima, which is kismet. Is kismet submitting to God’s will, some predetermined fate, or is it more or less ‘going with the flow.’”

She responds, “Charlie I am no Koran teacher, but the word in Islam means to submit. God’s will is everything, and that is why I



think fanatical Islamists, as you say, seek to take Allah's place, *pretending* to know his will. But kismet is supposed to mean our personal destiny, a prearranged course of events in our lives, but of course we do not presume to know our kismet until it happens. I guess we would like it both ways, Charlie, like everyone else. We want good things to happen, when they do we rejoice, saying it is our fate, but then when bad things happen we also say it is our fate, and we are sad. Yet what will take place? Fayet understood that we do not know anything beforehand except to pray. Remember he said, 'God knows and we do not,' but it is reassuring to understand that at least God cares enough to have a plan. I believe that you and I have come together because of kismet, and that is good. If we can stop Aboud, that is kismet," to which Charles responds, "Thanks for your interpretation, Fatima, but I believe in free choice."

What do you think?

Fatima also constantly insists that Aboud, the fanatical Algerian in the book, is evil, and warns everyone she knows about his true

nature. She, a Muslim, knows that such men twist the interpretation of the Koran to fit their own purposes, as do people of other faiths manipulate sacred texts for their own ends.

What do you believe about the nature of evil? Personally, I believe that Albert Camus had it right when he wrote: “The chorus in the classical tragedies (of the Greeks) generally advises prudence. For the chorus knows that up to a certain limit everyone is right and the person, who from blindness or passion, oversteps this limit is heading for catastrophe, if he persists in his desire to assert a right he thinks he alone possesses.” Such arrogance is not limited to fanatical Muslims like Aboud who beleives he alone is right, but can be found everywhere, in all faiths and in all leaders, and in any land, and it always leads to trouble. In the book I quote a Jewish man who I remember was the 94 year old father of a woman who was married to a member of the cathedral, both of whom attended the cathedral on occasion. Her father was a lawyer from New York City who was a friend of mayors and who had written the code of civic ethics for the city; he came up to me after

the marriage in the Mayor's office (Maire) and said to me, "Reverend, I want you to know that I am a son of immigrants. They worked hard and I did to, but they always told me, and I never forgot it, that I had the responsibility all my life to be a decent human being." I respected him and believe that decent human beings of all faiths know their limits and seek to refrain from arrogance.

In terms of the second and last premises of my book, I hope many of you have visited the largest English reading library on the Continent, the American library, but I also hope that you have not had a need for the American hospital in Neuilly. Perhaps you are acquainted with some children who attended the American School or know of students who have gone to the University. My French teacher in Paris was very proud of her daughter for graduating from the American university. We have many people of every country who visited the Cathedral, which is Anglican or Episcopalian and because our service is similar to the Roman Catholic most French visitors felt a certain familiarity until they on

occasion saw a woman behind the altar, and then realized we were different. The same might be true for the pulpit of the general Protestant American Church off the Quai.

Yet these are cornerstones for English speaking residents in Paris and all have an interesting history. The Cathedral, for example, began in 1857 and the church was built in 1886, preceding the Eiffel tower. During World War II the cathedral was occupied by the German Wehrmacht (Army) chaplaincy, the headquarters for the army was of course nearby at the Hotel George V.

After the fall of France, the dean at the time was asked by President Roosevelt to leave and return to the States to speak across our country about the Nazi menace while organist Lawrence Whipp remained in charge. He was imprisoned in an internment camp, however, when war between the US and the axis powers was declared. While interred he organized some imprisoned musicians to play a concert, and one of the pieces he played was by Fritz Kreisler. The commandant of the camp rose up afterwards

and applauded, but when his Nazi superior found out he immediately fired the commandant. Whipp remained there for more than a year until he was released through the generosity of some French friends who presented a treasured painting to Field Marshal Hermann Goering in exchange for his release.

The American hospital served French and American troops in World War I and was linked to the use of ambulances operated by the American Field Service, a history of which can be seen at Blerancourt museum. In World War I the dean of the cathedral was chaplain to the hospital and in charge of the ambulance service, and he often was an advocate for the wounded. For example, he wrote in his memoirs about the Zoave's dog. A brave and loyal Zoave soldier was taken from the front by an ambulance, accompanied by his dog to the hospital, but the matron of nurses refused to let the dog enter the antiseptic atmosphere. Yet after hearing the soldier's heartfelt story about his love for his dog, the dean intervened with the hospital administrator, and the animal after being decontaminated was allowed to "bound" into the ward

each day and to sit loyally by the Zoave's bed. The Zoave had told the story of being buried alive after a bomb burst in his trench and that he only survived with two badly broken legs because his dog dug out a hole which allowed others to notice him and to thus rescue him.

There are many, many stories of cooperation historically between France and the United States, but none more special to me than in the immediate *aftermath of 9/11* when I can testify that the cathedral steps were filled with flowers and votive candles for days on end. French citizens of all backgrounds came daily to write moving sentiments in our remembrance book and to offer prayers before our altar, I believe because we were seen as a victim like France had been so often in war. We were not just a superpower to these kind people but as vulnerable as so many had been in France in both wars.

Do you recall that French police who trained dogs to uncover bombing victims were the first to arrive from France a day or two after 9/11 in New York? They assisted in the search process for

survivors. These trainers and their dogs attended our annual service of the blessing of the animals in October 2001. Coincidentally, New York City Mayor Rudy Guilianni's special task force of men and women who worked day and night to save people directly after 9/11 flew to Paris to thank these dog trainers personally for their assistance, and when they heard about our service decided to attend, offering praise for these valiant Frenchmen and their highly trained animals. A year later the Prime Minister of France and the Mayor of Paris attended a service on 9/11 2002, accompanied by snipers who politely made their way through our sacristy to the roof of the cathedral, which was in remembrance for victims of the more than 80 countries represented in the downing of the towers.

In conclusion, *Paris Under Siege* is about three Americans and a woman Muslim working together with the French government to stop a fanatical terrorist, a task that not only continues in the sequel to this book, called *Paris On Fire*, but also may well be ongoing. Both France and the US cooperate to prevent terrorist bloodshed anywhere in this still new threshold to a

troubled Millennium. Yet above all, I hope the book for you is a good read and will keep you interested to the very last page. Thank you very much for your attentive listening and for your interest in *Paris Under Siege*.