

INTERFAITH INSIGHT

Kerry calls for religious values in the global scene

By Douglas Kindschi

Director, Kaufman Interfaith Institute, GVSU

In a recent lecture at Rice University, U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry made the case for understanding the role of religion in order to understand the global political scene.

Kerry stressed the enormous impact religious belief and religious identity have on world events.

He said if he had college to do again, he would be sure to study comparative religion, adding: "Consider that four out of five people on Earth align themselves with one religious tradition or another, and that over the centuries, religious teachings, movements and conflicts have done as much as any secular ideology or economic force to determine the political context and geographical boundaries that define the international arena."

Kerry said when Madeleine

Albright became secretary of state in the Clinton administration, she had advisers for military, political and economic issues but not a single adviser on religious affairs.

That has changed dramatically, with many advisers to the secretary representing all major religious traditions.

Kerry has made it a point to meet with Pope Francis and the Archbishop of Canterbury, as well as representatives from Jewish communities, Sunni and Shia Muslim leaders, and American Hindus and Orthodox Christians.

'NOT A WAR OF CIVILIZATIONS'

He made it clear that we are not in a war of civilizations against each other, but war of uncivilized barbarians against the civilized world.

He expressed grave concern over rising anti-Semitism in Europe and growing Islamophobia in Europe and America.

Citing the presence of Muslims at the founding of our country, as well as more recent immigrants,

he said they live throughout the country, work in a broad array of occupations and "are part of the social fabric that defines and binds our country together."

But the terrorist threat is real. While it has been condemned by religious and political leaders throughout the Muslim world, action also is needed.

"The terrorists are actively pursuing a long-term plan, a multigenerational plan," Kerry said. "The lure of extremism can be hard to resist ... if you are a child with nothing in your stomach and somebody offers you regular meals, companionship, and an upside-down worldview in which you have a place on center stage.

"Religious leaders of all backgrounds are constantly reminding us that we have an obligation to reach out to the poor and the marginalized," Kerry said.

"We also have a deeply rooted interest in doing so, because nothing could be more dangerous for our future than the prospect of huge numbers of young adults wandering the globe, frustrated in their ambitions and acutely aware, because ... with

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smartphones ... they get to see what others have and they get to think about what they don't have."

But Kerry went beyond just the economic conditions and spoke to "whether young people feel a greater stake in building their countries up rather than tearing them down."

UNDERSTANDING THEIR STAKE

Most religions understand that truth, he said.

Kerry said Sen. Robert Kennedy also did when, in the 1960s, he said:

"Our gross national product ... does not include the beauty of our poetry or the strength of our

marriages, the intelligence of our public debate or the integrity of our public officials. It measures neither our wit nor our courage, neither our wisdom nor our learning, neither our compassion nor our devotion to country. It measures everything, in short, except that which makes life worthwhile."

Kerry acknowledged "all of the major religions share a sense of universal values. They seek to define the things that make life worthwhile, a moral truth based on the dignity of all human beings."

The video of this talk and the transcript can be found at bakerinstitute.org/events/1790.

How refreshing to hear a major political leader speak seriously and meaningfully about the importance of religion in the global scene.

His call for understanding and engagement should inspire us to see how our deep religious beliefs and values can be central to building a flourishing and peaceful world.

— Contact interfaith@gvsu.edu



Kindschi