

## Compassion is not 'soft,' it's the key to global survival, acclaimed author insists

**Author:** Todd, Douglas

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**Abstract** The author of best-selling books, including *The History of God*, responded to complaints that religion has been a source of violence by telling a Simon Fraser University audience this week not to forget secular movements have also been destructive. To formally become a "City of Compassion," a certain number of signatures must be collected, plans approved to promote acts of compassion and the mayor must make a declaration.

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**Full text** Even though she criticizes religious leaders for turning their backs on compassion, famed author Karen Armstrong stood up for Buddha, Jesus, Confucius and other luminaries during her extended visit to Metro Vancouver.

The author of best-selling books, including *The History of God*, responded to complaints that religion has been a source of violence by telling a Simon Fraser University audience this week not to forget secular movements have also been destructive.

"Let me put in a word for religion," Armstrong said. Both Buddha and Jesus, she explained, responded to their chaotic times by bearing "witness to a different way of living" - to an ethos that counters selfishness.

Armstrong, arguably the planet's most popular author on world religions, made her remarks during a 12-day blitz for compassion in Vancouver, which wraps up Friday.

As part of an initiative that is taking her from Pakistan to Jordan, Europe to North America, the former Catholic nun has talked up compassion to thousands at various events across Metro Vancouver.

Her visit is sponsored by a diverse collection of organizations, including SFU's Centre for Dialogue, Vancity Credit Union, the Vancouver Board of Trade and the Greater Vancouver Compassion Network.

such a cosmopolitan place."

Despite her defence of some religions' founders, Armstrong said her key motivation in creating the Charter was disenchantment with today's religious leaders.

"You never hear about (compassion) from religions," she said. "When religions come together they're usually discoursing about some doctrine, or some orthodoxy, or a sexual practice they don't approve of."

What the world needs now, she said, is for religious people to rediscover their "compassionate voice."

Every religion, Armstrong said, essentially "insists you cannot confine your benevolence to your own group.

'Love the stranger.' 'Love your enemies,' said Jesus. 'Reach out to all tribes and nations,' says the Koran."

Since the world is inter-connected as never before, Armstrong said "it's a denial of reality" to confine compassion to one's family, friends or group.

"We have created a global market. Politically we're linked as well. What happens in Afghanistan today could have repercussions in New York or London tomorrow. We're connected electronically on the World Wide Web. And we face the same environmental catastrophe.

"We now have to get on with one another. Our cities are multicultural. Look at Vancouver. We find ourselves living cheek-by-jowl with different people. And we sometimes don't like this. But we've got to do it, because this is the reality of the global market."

dtodd@vancouver.sun.com

vancouver.sun.com/thesearch

Twitter.com/douglastodd

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