

Dean Of Duke Chapel Luke Powery Parrots, and Decries, "Essentializing"

Appointed just a few years ago to be Dean of the Duke Chapel, [Luke Powery](#) was on NPR the other day, decrying the “essentializing” of Islam (and Muslims). He used the word about five times, as if he had just recently learned it, liked its sound, liked what he thought it meant, and was going to use and use it as much as he could. “Essentializing” is a word that for the past decade has been a favorite of Muslim apologists. It means: anyone who makes any comments at all about Islam or about Muslims is “essentializing” them, making generalizations that can never be made because Islam is so various, so un-monolithic (“Islam is not a monolith” is another favorite way of doing the work that the word “essentializing” is meant to do), that those who make any statements about it at all are the crudest and nastiest of generalizers. If, however, one says that Islam is a “religion of peace and tolerance” that is never “essentializing” nor can such a statement be declared false because someone says – so inapposite in this case – that “Islam is not monolithic.” It’s only “not-monolithic” if something pejorative is said; it’s only “essentializing” if you say something critical about Islam.

What Luke Powery, new to this “essentializing” business and a perfect naif, putty in the hands of that “ungrateful one” or Kuffar Omid Safi – for what could be more ungrateful than a Muslim, born in America to Iranian parents who had fled the Islamic Republic of Iran but apparently held on to their Islam, and passed it on to their son, doing what he can to further Islam, an ideology whose main teachings and texts discourage free inquiry, encourage hostility toward, and hatred of, Christians and Jews and others who do not even

qualify as “People of the Book” (Ahl al-Kitab), that treats women as inferior to men, that holds out for emulation as the “Perfect Man” someone who held slaves, attacked perfectly innocent farmers, and married, and consummated a marriage, with a girl of nine. Omid Safi did not get his wish to move from Temple to Harvard Divinity School, but he found a stepped-up basis for his existence at the Center for Islamic Studies, a bastion, mostly the work of Bruce Lawrence, that welcomes, hires and promotes, those who are adept at being apologists for Islam, but does not invite in, even for a lecture, those who are critical of Islam, either apostates such as Ayaan Hirsi Ali, Ibn Warraq, Wafa Sultan, or Western students of Islam, for there are some, who do not follow the party line. The Center for Islamic Studies is a scandal, but only to those who have the background – why should Presidents and other administrators, why should faculty members who jealously guard their own autonomy want to look into other departments, unless they happen, let’s say, to be non-Muslims who have endured life in Muslim countries and, like refugees from the Nazis or the Communists, feel they have a duty to warn us about infiltration from within, including that which happens on university campuses where extraordinarily naive students can be fed a narrative, kept from finding out about certain parts, or have those parts cunningly explained away before they even have a chance to see them, of the Qur’an, Hadith, and Sira, and have soothingly intoned a false confession that yes, there is a little something that has to be done with Islam, just to put Islam in synch with “modernity” but nothing more, nothing that can’t easily be handled if we can only stop “the haters on both sides” – you know, such people as the killers of the cartoonists (but really, did they have to offend in such a way? why, even the Pope was appalled), and Franklin Graham?

Omid Safi deserves to have his lectures taped, so that we can all see what he offers students, by way of his introduction to Islam. And so do his fellows. And why should they object? On

what possible grounds could they object – isn't this the age of Internet learning? Shouldn't the rest of the faculty, and the Administration at Duke, learn all about what goes on at the Center for Islamic Studies. Just to make sure that we know we're right when we take a stand, like the Reverend Luke Powery, on the evils of "essentializing."