

karen armstrong history of god

Karen Armstrong History of God

The exploration of divine concepts and spiritual understanding has long captivated human thought throughout history. Among the most influential contemporary voices on this subject is Karen Armstrong, renowned for her profound insights into religious history and her seminal work, *A History of God*. This book traces the evolution of the concept of God across different civilizations and eras, offering a comprehensive perspective on how divine ideas have shaped and been shaped by human culture. In this article, we delve into Karen Armstrong's approach to the history of God, her key themes, and the significance of her work in understanding religion today.

Who is Karen Armstrong?

Background and Career

Karen Armstrong is a British author and scholar of religion, born in 1944. Her early life was marked by a deep interest in spirituality, which led her to join a nunnery at the age of 17. However, after several years, she left the convent, driven by a desire to understand religion from a broader perspective. She became an academic, writing extensively on religious history, theology, and ethics.

Major Works

Armstrong's bibliography includes numerous influential books, but her most renowned work is *A History of God*, published in 1993. This book has been translated into multiple languages and has played a significant role in fostering interfaith dialogue and understanding. Other notable works include *The Case for God*, *The Great Transformation*, and *Islam: A Short History*.

The Core Themes of A History of God

Evolution of the Concept of God

One of the central themes in Armstrong's work is the idea that the concept of God has evolved significantly over thousands of years. She argues that early human societies projected their understanding of divine power based on their social and cultural contexts.

1. **Ancient Polytheism:** Early civilizations worshipped multiple gods representing natural forces and societal roles.
2. **Monotheism Emerges:** Over time, some cultures began to conceive of a singular, all-encompassing divine being, leading to monotheistic religions like Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

3. **Modern Interpretations:** In contemporary times, the idea of God has become more abstract and philosophical, often interpreted as a universal spirit rather than a personal deity.

Religious Transformation and Personal Experience

Armstrong emphasizes that throughout history, the understanding of God has been intertwined with human experiences and societal changes. She explores how personal spirituality and institutional religion influence each other, shaping the way adherents perceive the divine.

Challenges to Traditional Views

The book also discusses the crises and debates within religious traditions, such as the rise of scientific rationalism and secularism, which have challenged traditional notions of God and faith.

The Historical Development of the Idea of God

Ancient Civilizations and Polytheism

In early societies, gods were closely linked to natural phenomena and societal order. Examples include:

- Egyptian gods like Ra and Osiris
- Mesopotamian deities such as Marduk and Ishtar
- Greece's pantheon of gods like Zeus and Athena

These gods often embodied specific forces or aspects of life, serving as intermediaries between humans and the cosmos.

Monotheism and the Rise of Ethical Religion

The shift towards monotheism marked a significant development. Key points include:

- The Hebrew Bible's conception of Yahweh as a singular, moral deity
- Prophets like Isaiah emphasizing social justice and divine morality
- Christianity and Islam expanding on monotheistic principles, emphasizing personal relationship with God

Armstrong discusses how these faiths redefined their divine concepts in ways that emphasized ethical conduct and spiritual devotion.

The Enlightenment and Modern Challenges

With the Enlightenment came rationalism, scientific discovery, and secular ideologies that questioned traditional religious beliefs. Armstrong highlights:

- Deism and the idea of a distant creator
- Secular humanism replacing divine authority in public life
- Post-modern skepticism about religious narratives and divine intervention

Despite these challenges, many religious thinkers have sought to reinterpret the divine in ways compatible with modern knowledge.

Impact and Significance of Karen Armstrong's Work

Facilitating Interfaith Dialogue

Armstrong's historical approach promotes understanding among different faiths by revealing shared origins and common themes. Her work encourages dialogue based on mutual respect and knowledge.

Reframing the Modern Understanding of God

Her analysis suggests that contemporary conceptions of God are not fixed but are evolving. This perspective invites believers and non-believers alike to reconsider their views on spirituality and religious practice.

Encouraging Ethical and Compassionate Living

Armstrong emphasizes that the core of many religious traditions is compassion and ethical conduct. Her work advocates for spirituality that fosters empathy and social justice.

Conclusion

Karen Armstrong's *A History of God* offers a profound and accessible exploration of how human beings have understood and related to the divine throughout history. By tracing the evolution from polytheism to monotheism and beyond, she highlights the dynamic nature of religious ideas and their influence on culture, morality, and personal identity. Her work remains a

vital resource for anyone interested in understanding the roots of faith, the diversity of spiritual beliefs, and the ongoing dialogue about the divine in a rapidly changing world. Through her scholarship, Armstrong invites us to see the history of God not just as a story of religion, but as a reflection of humanity's continual quest for meaning, connection, and transcendence.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the central theme of Karen Armstrong's 'A History of God'?

The central theme of 'A History of God' is the exploration of how the concept of God has evolved across different cultures and religions over thousands of years.

How does Karen Armstrong approach the study of religious history in her book?

Armstrong approaches the study through a comparative and empathetic lens, examining the development of monotheistic and polytheistic ideas and emphasizing the shared spiritual roots of various faiths.

What are some key historical periods covered in 'A History of God'?

The book covers significant periods such as ancient Egypt, the Hebrew prophets, the rise of Christianity and Islam, and the modern era, tracing how the concept of God transformed over time.

In what way has Karen Armstrong's 'A History of God' influenced contemporary religious discussions?

The book has fostered greater understanding of religious diversity and history, encouraging dialogue and promoting the idea that evolving interpretations of God can lead to more compassionate interfaith relations.

What role does the concept of divine imagery play in Armstrong's historical analysis?

Armstrong discusses how divine imagery reflects human attempts to understand and relate to the divine, noting that these images have changed significantly over time, influenced by cultural and philosophical shifts.

How does Karen Armstrong connect the historical evolution of the concept of God to modern spirituality?

She argues that understanding the historical development of God's concept reveals the flexibility and adaptability of faith, encouraging a more personal and less dogmatic approach to spirituality today.

What critiques or controversies has 'A History of God' faced since its publication?

Some critics have argued that the book simplifies complex theological ideas or emphasizes historical development at the expense of doctrinal fidelity, but it remains influential for its accessible synthesis of religious history.

Why is 'A History of God' considered a significant work in the study of religious history?

Because it provides a comprehensive, well-researched narrative that bridges academic scholarship and accessible storytelling, helping readers understand how concepts of the divine have shaped human civilization.

Additional Resources

Karen Armstrong's "A History of God" stands as a landmark work in the fields of religious studies and theological history. This comprehensive exploration traces the evolution of the concept of God across the major monotheistic faiths—Judaism, Christianity, and Islam—shedding light on how divine understanding has transformed over millennia. Armstrong's meticulous research and engaging narrative make this book a vital resource for anyone interested in the development of spiritual ideas and the human quest for transcendence. In this article, we will delve into the core themes of Armstrong's "A History of God," analyze its historical insights, and explore its significance in contemporary religious discourse.

Introduction: Why "A History of God" Matters

Karen Armstrong's "A History of God" is more than a simple recounting of religious doctrines; it is a profound inquiry into how human beings have perceived and related to the divine throughout history. The book's importance lies in its ability to contextualize religious beliefs within the broader socio-cultural and political landscapes, revealing that concepts of God are dynamic, evolving, and deeply intertwined with human civilization itself.

The Genesis of Divine Concepts in Early Cultures

Prehistoric and Ancient Views of the Divine

Before the rise of organized religions, early humans likely conceptualized divine or spiritual forces as animistic energies present in nature. These primitive ideas laid the groundwork for more complex theological developments:

- Animism: Belief that spirits inhabit natural objects.
- Ancestor Worship: Reverence for ancestors as spiritual guides.
- Shamanism: Mediation between humans and spirits by shamans.

The Birth of Monotheism

Armstrong traces the shift from polytheism and animism to monotheism,

emphasizing the revolutionary emergence of the idea of one supreme divine being:

- Zoroastrianism: One of the earliest monotheistic faiths emerging in Persia.
- Jewish Monotheism: The development of Yahweh worship during the Hebrew prophets' era, emphasizing a personal, moral deity.

This transition was not immediate but occurred over centuries, reflecting evolving social structures and spiritual needs.

The Evolution of the Idea of God in Judaism

From Tribal Deity to Universal God

In early Judaism, God was primarily seen as a protector of the Israelite tribe. Over time, this conception expanded:

- Prophetic Movement: Emphasis on justice, mercy, and ethical monotheism.
- Destruction and Exile: Experiences that challenged and reshaped Jewish understanding of God's nature.
- Rabbinic Judaism: Formalization of beliefs and the development of a more abstract, omnipresent deity.

Key Themes in Jewish Theology

- Covenant: The special relationship between God and His people.
- Transcendence vs. Immanence: Balancing God's otherworldliness with His closeness to humans.
- Messianism: Hope for divine intervention and the coming of a messiah.

Christianity's Concept of God

The Trinity and the Incarnation

Armstrong explores how Christianity reinterpreted Jewish monotheism through the doctrines of:

- The Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—one God in three persons.
- The Incarnation: God becoming human in Jesus Christ, emphasizing divine immanence.

Theological Debates and Developments

Throughout history, Christian thinkers grappled with questions about the nature of God:

- Arian Controversy: Debates over Christ's divinity.
- The Nicene Creed: Formalizing orthodox beliefs about the nature of God.
- Mysticism: Personal experiences of divine union.

Challenges to the Concept of God

Modernity prompted questions about God's nature, especially in light of scientific discoveries and philosophical critiques, leading to diverse interpretations within Christianity.

Islam's Understanding of God

The Uniqueness of Allah

Armstrong details how Islamic monotheism emphasizes Allah's absolute oneness and transcendence, reinforcing the notion that:

- Tawhid: The indivisible oneness of God.
- Revelation: The Quran as the final and complete revelation of divine will.

The Attributes of Allah

Islamic theology describes Allah via various attributes:

- Merciful, just, omniscient, omnipotent.
- Beyond human comprehension, yet accessible through prayer and submission.

The Role of Prophets

Islam recognizes prophets like Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad, emphasizing that these figures brought revelations about God's will.

The Common Threads and Divergences

Shared Roots

Despite differences, Armstrong highlights commonalities in the Abrahamic faiths:

- Monotheism as a unifying principle.
- Ethical commandments rooted in divine will.
- The importance of sacred texts.

Divergent Views

Differences emerge in areas such as:

- The nature of God's relationship with humanity.
- The role of Jesus and Muhammad.
- Ritual practices and religious law.

The Historical Contexts Shaping Divine Concepts

Political and Social Influences

Armstrong emphasizes that ideas of God are often shaped by:

- Empire and conquest: Conceptions of divine authority often justified political power.
- Philosophical trends: Rationalism, mysticism, and existentialism influence theological evolution.
- Crisis and upheaval: Exile, persecution, and war prompt reevaluation of divine attributes.

The Enlightenment and Modern Challenges

The rise of scientific inquiry and secularism challenged traditional notions of divine omnipotence and intervention, leading to:

- Deism.
- Agnosticism.
- Theological liberalism.

The Dynamic Nature of the Concept of God

From Static to Evolving Ideas

Armstrong stresses that the idea of God is not fixed but has undergone continuous transformation:

- Ancient to medieval: From tribal deity to universal, moral God.
- Modern era: From dogmatic certainty to more personal, mystical, or skeptical views.

The Role of Personal and Cultural Contexts

Individual spirituality and cultural backgrounds shape how believers experience and interpret the divine concept.

Significance and Contemporary Implications

Interfaith Dialogue

Understanding the historical development of God's concept fosters mutual respect and dialogue among faiths.

The Search for Meaning

Recognizing the evolving nature of divine ideas can inspire contemporary spiritual exploration and openness.

Challenges and Opportunities

- Addressing secular critiques.
- Reconciling scientific understanding with spiritual beliefs.
- Embracing diversity within and across faith traditions.

Conclusion: The Enduring Human Quest

Karen Armstrong's "A History of God" reveals that the human conception of the divine is a profound reflection of our collective journey—our fears, hopes, moral aspirations, and quest for meaning. By tracing the contours of this evolution, Armstrong invites us to appreciate the richness of religious traditions and consider how our own understanding of God continues to develop in the modern world.

Whether one approaches this history from a religious, academic, or personal perspective, Armstrong's work offers invaluable insights into how divine ideas shape human civilization and individual lives. It underscores that the concept of God is not static but a living, breathing aspect of human culture—continually reinterpreted, challenged, and renewed across generations.

[Karen Armstrong History Of God](#)

karen armstrong history of god: A History of God Karen Armstrong, 2011-08-10 Why does God exist? How have the three dominant monotheistic religions—Judaism, Christianity, and Islam—shaped and altered the conception of God? How have these religions influenced each other? In this stunningly intelligent book, Karen Armstrong, one of Britain's foremost commentators on religious affairs, traces the history of how men and women have perceived and experienced God, from the time of Abraham to the present. The epic story begins with the Jews' gradual transformation of pagan idol worship in Babylon into true monotheism—a concept previously unknown in the world. Christianity and Islam both rose on the foundation of this revolutionary idea, but these religions refashioned 'the One God' to suit the social and political needs of their followers. From classical philosophy and medieval mysticism to the Reformation, Karen Armstrong performs the near miracle of distilling the intellectual history of monotheism into one superbly readable volume, destined to take its place as a classic. Praise for History of God “An admirable and impressive work of synthesis that will give insight and satisfaction to thousands of lay readers.”—The Washington Post Book World “A brilliantly lucid, spendidly readable book. [Karen] Armstrong has a dazzling ability: she can take a long and complex subject and reduce it to the fundamentals, without oversimplifying.”—The Sunday Times (London) “Absorbing . . . A lode of learning.”—Time “The most fascinating and learned study of the biggest wild goose chase in history—the quest for God. Karen Armstrong is a genius.”—A.N. Wilson, author of *Jesus: A Life*

karen armstrong history of god: A History of God Karen Armstrong, 1993 We look first at the gradual move away from the pagan gods to the full-fledged monotheism of the Jews during the exile in Babylon. Next considered is the development of parallel, yet different, perceptions and beliefs among Christians and Muslims.

karen armstrong history of god: *The case for God* Karen Armstrong, 2009 Moving from the Paleolithic age to the present, Karen Armstrong details the great lengths to which humankind has gone in order to experience a sacred reality that it called by many names, such as God, Brahman, Nirvana, Allah, or Dao. Focusing especially on Christianity but including Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Chinese spiritualities, Armstrong examines the diminished impulse toward religion in 21st century, when a significant number of people either want nothing to do with God or question the efficacy of faith. Why has God become unbelievable? Why is it that atheists and theists alike think and speak about God in a way that veers so profoundly from the thinking of our ancestors? Answering these questions, Armstrong makes clear how the changing face of the world has necessarily changed the importance of religion at both the societal and the individual level. And she makes an argument for drawing on the insights of the past in order to build a faith that speaks to the needs of our dangerously polarized age. Yet she cautions readers that religion was never supposed to provide answers that lie within the competence of human reason; that, she says, is the role of logos.

karen armstrong history of god: *The Great Transformation* Karen Armstrong, 2009-02-24 From one of the world's leading writers on religion and the highly acclaimed author of the

bestselling *A History of God*, *The Battle for God* and *The Spiral Staircase*, comes a major new work: a chronicle of one of the most important intellectual revolutions in world history and its relevance to our own time. In one astonishing, short period – the ninth century BCE – the peoples of four distinct regions of the civilized world created the religious and philosophical traditions that have continued to nourish humanity into the present day: Confucianism and Daoism in China; Hinduism and Buddhism in India; monotheism in Israel; and philosophical rationalism in Greece. Historians call this the Axial Age because of its central importance to humanity's spiritual development. Now, Karen Armstrong traces the rise and development of this transformative moment in history, examining the brilliant contributions to these traditions made by such figures as the Buddha, Socrates, Confucius and Ezekiel. Armstrong makes clear that despite some differences of emphasis, there was remarkable consensus among these religions and philosophies: each insisted on the primacy of compassion over hatred and violence. She illuminates what this "family" resemblance reveals about the religious impulse and quest of humankind. And she goes beyond spiritual archaeology, delving into the ways in which these Axial Age beliefs can present an instructive and thought-provoking challenge to the ways we think about and practice religion today. A revelation of humankind's early shared imperatives, yearnings and inspired solutions – as salutary as it is fascinating. Excerpt from *The Great Transformation*: In our global world, we can no longer afford a parochial or exclusive vision. We must learn to live and behave as though people in remote parts of the globe were as important as ourselves. The sages of the Axial Age did not create their compassionate ethic in idyllic circumstances. Each tradition developed in societies like our own that were torn apart by violence and warfare as never before; indeed, the first catalyst of religious change was usually a visceral rejection of the aggression that the sages witnessed all around them. . . . All the great traditions that were created at this time are in agreement about the supreme importance of charity and benevolence, and this tells us something important about our humanity.

karen armstrong history of god: *A History of God* Karen Armstrong, 1999 In this extensive and original account of the evolution of belief, Karen Armstrong examines Western society's unerring fidelity to the idea of One God and the many conflicting convictions it engenders.

karen armstrong history of god: *The Battle for God* Karen Armstrong, 2001-01-30 In the late twentieth century, fundamentalism has emerged as one of the most powerful forces at work in the world, contesting the dominance of modern secular values and threatening peace and harmony around the globe. Yet it remains incomprehensible to a large number of people. In *The Battle for God*, Karen Armstrong brilliantly and sympathetically shows us how and why fundamentalist groups came into existence and what they yearn to accomplish. We see the West in the sixteenth century beginning to create an entirely new kind of civilization, which brought in its wake change in every aspect of life -- often painful and violent, even if liberating. Armstrong argues that one of the things that changed most was religion. People could no longer think about or experience the divine in the same way; they had to develop new forms of faith to fit their new circumstances. Armstrong characterizes fundamentalism as one of these new ways of being religious that have emerged in every major faith tradition. Focusing on Protestant fundamentalism in the United States, Jewish fundamentalism in Israel, and Muslim fundamentalism in Egypt and Iran, she examines the ways in which these movements, while not monolithic, have each sprung from a dread of modernity -- often in response to assault (sometimes unwitting, sometimes intentional) by the mainstream society. Armstrong sees fundamentalist groups as complex, innovative, and modern -- rather than as throwbacks to the past -- but contends that they have failed in religious terms. Maintaining that fundamentalism often exists in symbiotic relationship with an aggressive modernity, each impelling the other on to greater excess, she suggests compassion as a way to defuse what is now an intensifying conflict. **BONUS:** This edition contains an excerpt from Karen Armstrong's *Twelve Steps to a Compassionate Life*.

karen armstrong history of god: *A History of God* Karen Armstrong, 1997-04-22 An admirable and impressive work of synthesis that will give insight and satisfaction to thousands of lay readers. **THE WASHINGTON POST BOOK WORLD** In this stunningly intelligent book, Karen

Armstrong, one of Britain's foremost commentators on religious affairs, traces the history of how men and women have perceived and experienced God, from the time of Abraham to the present. From classical philosophy and medieval mysticism to the Reformation, the Enlightenment, and the modern age of skepticism, Karen Armstrong performs the near miracle of distilling the intellectual history of monotheism into one superbly readable volume, destined to take its place as a classic.

karen armstrong history of god: Fields of Blood Karen Armstrong, 2014-10-28 A sweeping exploration of religion and the history of human violence—from the New York Times bestselling author of *The History of God* • “Elegant and powerful.... Both erudite and accurate, dazzling in its breadth of knowledge and historical detail.” —The Washington Post In these times of rising geopolitical chaos, the need for mutual understanding between cultures has never been more urgent. Religious differences are seen as fuel for violence and warfare. In these pages, one of our greatest writers on religion, Karen Armstrong, amasses a sweeping history of humankind to explore the perceived connection between war and the world’s great creeds—and to issue a passionate defense of the peaceful nature of faith. With unprecedented scope, Armstrong looks at the whole history of each tradition—not only Christianity and Islam, but also Buddhism, Hinduism, Confucianism, Daoism, and Judaism. Religions, in their earliest days, endowed every aspect of life with meaning, and warfare became bound up with observances of the sacred. Modernity has ushered in an epoch of spectacular violence, although, as Armstrong shows, little of it can be ascribed directly to religion. Nevertheless, she shows us how and in what measure religions came to absorb modern belligerence—and what hope there might be for peace among believers of different faiths in our time.

karen armstrong history of god: The Bible Karen Armstrong, 2008-11-18 The renowned religious historian “preaches the gospel truth . . . explaining how the spiritual guide . . . came into being and evolved over the centuries” (Vanity Fair). As the single work at the heart of Christianity, the world’s largest organized religion, the Bible is the spiritual guide for one out of every three people in the world. It is also the world’s most widely distributed book and its bestselling, with an estimated six billion copies sold in the last two hundred years. But the Bible is a complex work with a complicated and obscure history. Its contents have changed over the centuries, it has been transformed by translation, and, through interpretation, has developed manifold meanings to various religions, denominations, and sects. In this seminal account, acclaimed historian Karen Armstrong discusses the conception, gestation, life, and afterlife of history’s most powerful book. Armstrong analyzes the social and political situation in which oral history turned into written scripture, how this all-pervasive scripture was collected into one work, how it became accepted as Christianity’s sacred text, and how its interpretation changed over time. Armstrong’s history of the Bible is a brilliant, captivating book, crucial in an age of declining faith and rising fundamentalism. “Vintage Armstrong: sweeping, bold, incisive, and insightful. In eight chapters it covers the history of the writing, canonizing, and reading of the Bible . . . Her choice of topics is impeccable . . . and her brief, 23-page discussion on the rise of the Talmud is masterful.” —Choice “An excellent précis of the writing and compiling of the Bible and the ensuing centuries of biblical interpretation . . . one terrific little book.” —Booklist

karen armstrong history of god: In the Beginning Karen Armstrong, 1997-10-07 “Karen Armstrong is a genius.”—A. N. Wilson As the foundation stone of the Jewish and Christian scriptures, The Book of Genesis unfolds some of the most arresting stories of world literature—the Creation; Adam and Eve; Cain and Abel; the sacrifice of Isaac. Yet the meaning of Genesis remains enigmatic. In this fascinating volume, Karen Armstrong, author of the highly acclaimed bestseller *A History of God*, brilliantly illuminates the mysteries and profundities of this mystifying work. “A lyrical chronicle of one woman's wrestling with Genesis that can serve as a guide to others . . . As notable for its scholarship as it is for its honesty and vulnerability.”—Publishers Weekly “Armstrong can simplify complex ideas, but she is never simplistic.”—The New York Times Book Review

karen armstrong history of god: A History of God Karen Armstrong, As soon as they became recognizably human, men and women—in their hunger to understand their own presence on earth

and the mysteries within and around them--began to worship gods. Karen Armstrong's masterly and illuminating book explores the ways in which the idea and experience of God evolved among the monotheists--Jews, Christians and Muslims. Weaving a multicolored fabric of historical, philosophical, intellectual and social developments and insights, Armstrong shows how, at various times through the centuries, each of the monotheistic religions has held a subtly different concept of God. At the same time she draws our attention to the basic and profound similarities among them, making it clear that in all of them God has been and is experienced intensely, passionately and often--especially in the West--traumatically. Some monotheists have seen darkness, desolation and terror, where others have seen light and transfiguration; the reasons for these inherent differences are examined, and the people behind them are brought to life. We look first at the gradual move away from the pagan gods to the full-fledged monotheism of the Jews during the exile in Babylon. Next considered is the development of parallel, yet different, perceptions and beliefs among Christians and Muslims. The book then moves generationally through time to examine the God of the philosophers and mystics in all three traditions, the God of the Reformation, the God of the Enlightenment and finally the nineteenth- and twentieth-century challenges of skeptics and atheists, as well as the fiercely reductive faith of the fundamentalists of our own day. Armstrong suggests that any particular idea of God must--if it is to survive--work for the people who develop it, and that ideas of God change when they cease to be effective. She argues that the concept of a personal God who behaves like a larger version of ourselves was suited to mankind at a certain stage but no longer works for an increasing number of people. Understanding the ever-changing ideas of God in the past and their relevance and usefulness in their time, she says, is a way to begin the search for a new concept for the twenty-first century. Her book shows that such a development is virtually inevitable, in spite of the despair of our increasingly Godless world, because it is a natural aspect of our humanity to seek a symbol for the ineffable reality that is universally perceived.--Publisher's description.

karen armstrong history of god: Jerusalem Karen Armstrong, 1997-04-29 **SPLENDID . . .** Eminently sane and patient . . . Essential reading for Jews, Christians, and Muslims alike. --The Washington Post Venerated for millennia by three faiths, torn by irreconcilable conflict, conquered, rebuilt, and mourned for again and again, Jerusalem is a sacred city whose very sacredness has engendered terrible tragedy. In this fascinating volume, Karen Armstrong, author of the highly praised *A History of God*, traces the history of how Jews, Christians, and Muslims have all laid claim to Jerusalem as their holy place, and how three radically different concepts of holiness have shaped and scarred the city for thousands of years. Armstrong unfolds a complex story of spiritual upheaval and political transformation--from King David's capital to an administrative outpost of the Roman Empire, from the cosmopolitan city sanctified by Christ to the spiritual center conquered and glorified by Muslims, from the gleaming prize of European Crusaders to the bullet-ridden symbol of the present-day Arab-Israeli conflict. Written with grace and clarity, the product of years of meticulous research, *Jerusalem* combines the pageant of history with the profundity of searching spiritual analysis. Like Karen Armstrong's *A History of God*, *Jerusalem* is a book for the ages. **THE BEST SERIOUS, ACCESSIBLE HISTORY OF THE MOST SPIRITUALLY IMPORTANT CITY IN THE WORLD.** --The Baltimore Sun **A WORK OF IMPRESSIVE SWEEP AND GRANDEUR.** --Los Angeles Times Book Review

karen armstrong history of god: Buddha Karen Armstrong, 2004-09-28 With such bestsellers as *A History of God* and *Islam*, Karen Armstrong has consistently delivered penetrating, readable, and prescient (The New York Times) works that have lucidly engaged a wide range of religions and religious issues. In *Buddha* she turns to a figure whose thought is still reverberating throughout the world 2,500 years after his death. Many know the Buddha only from seeing countless serene, iconic images. But what of the man himself and the world he lived in? What did he actually do in his roughly eighty years on earth that spawned one of the greatest religions in world history? Armstrong tackles these questions and more by examining the life and times of the Buddha in this engrossing philosophical biography. Against the tumultuous cultural background of his world, she blends

history, philosophy, mythology, and biography to create a compelling and illuminating portrait of a man whose awakening continues to inspire millions.

karen armstrong history of god: Muhammad Karen Armstrong, 2023-06-15 A life of the prophet Muhammad by bestselling author Karen Armstrong. 'Armstrong has a dazzling ability: she can take a long and complex subject and reduce it to its fundamentals, without over-simplifying' SUNDAY TIMES 'One of our best living writers on religion' FINANCIAL TIMES 'Not just a sympathetic book that would dispel the misconceptions and misgivings of its western readers, but also a book that is of considerable importance to Muslims' MUSLIM NEWS Most people in the West know very little about the prophet Muhammad. The acclaimed religious writer Karen Armstrong has written a biography which will give us a more accurate and profound understanding of Islam and the people who adhere to it so strongly. Muhammad also offers challenging comparisons with the two religions most closely related to it - Judaism and Christianity.

karen armstrong history of god: *Sacred Nature* Karen Armstrong, 2023-09-05 From one of the most original thinkers on the role of religion in the modern world, a profound exploration of the spiritual power of nature—and an urgent call to reclaim that power in everyday life. Much has been written on the scientific and technological aspects of climate change.... But Armstrong's book is both more personal and more profound. Its urgent message is that hearts and minds need to change if we are to once more learn to revere our beautiful and fragile planet. —The Guardian Since the beginning of time, humankind has looked upon nature and seen the divine. In the writings of the great thinkers across religions, the natural world inspires everything from fear, to awe, to tranquil contemplation; God, or however one defined the sublime, was present in everything. Yet today, even as we admire a tree or take in a striking landscape, we rarely see nature as sacred. In this short but deeply powerful book, the best-selling historian of religion Karen Armstrong re-sacralizes nature for modern times. Drawing on her vast knowledge of the world's religious traditions, she vividly describes nature's central place in spirituality across the centuries. In bringing this age-old wisdom to life, Armstrong shows modern readers how to rediscover nature's potency and form a connection to something greater than ourselves.

karen armstrong history of god: *A Short History of Myth (Myths series)* Karen Armstrong, 2010-10-29 What are myths? How have they evolved? And why do we still so desperately need them? A history of myth is a history of humanity, Karen Armstrong argues in this insightful and eloquent book: our stories and beliefs, our curiosity and attempts to understand the world, link us to our ancestors and each other. This is a brilliant and thought-provoking introduction to myth in the broadest sense—from Palaeolithic times to the “Great Western Transformation” of the last 500 years—and why we dismiss it only at our peril.

karen armstrong history of god: *The Battle for God* Karen Armstrong, 2011-08-10 In the late twentieth century, fundamentalism has emerged as one of the most powerful forces at work in the world, contesting the dominance of modern secular values and threatening peace and harmony around the globe. Yet it remains incomprehensible to a large number of people. In *The Battle for God*, Karen Armstrong brilliantly and sympathetically shows us how and why fundamentalist groups came into existence and what they yearn to accomplish. We see the West in the sixteenth century beginning to create an entirely new kind of civilization, which brought in its wake change in every aspect of life -- often painful and violent, even if liberating. Armstrong argues that one of the things that changed most was religion. People could no longer think about or experience the divine in the same way; they had to develop new forms of faith to fit their new circumstances. Armstrong characterizes fundamentalism as one of these new ways of being religious that have emerged in every major faith tradition. Focusing on Protestant fundamentalism in the United States, Jewish fundamentalism in Israel, and Muslim fundamentalism in Egypt and Iran, she examines the ways in which these movements, while not monolithic, have each sprung from a dread of modernity -- often in response to assault (sometimes unwitting, sometimes intentional) by the mainstream society. Armstrong sees fundamentalist groups as complex, innovative, and modern -- rather than as throwbacks to the past -- but contends that they have failed in religious terms. Maintaining that

fundamentalism often exists in symbiotic relationship with an aggressive modernity, each impelling the other on to greater excess, she suggests compassion as a way to defuse what is now an intensifying conflict. **BONUS:** This edition contains an excerpt from Karen Armstrong's *Twelve Steps to a Compassionate Life*.

karen armstrong history of god: The Spiral Staircase Karen Armstrong, 2007-12-18
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