

**Imad-ad-Dean Alamad, president of the Minaret of Freedom Institute.**

*(Unedited Transcript)*

Thank you. Greetings, good morning, peace be upon you.

I want to thank you for the opportunity to address you. I'm the second speaker who did not know Father Geno. Before I begin with my points, which given a 15 minute constraint, doesn't allow for a real exposition; it just means I can throw some ideas on the table and hope that you'll chew on them.

But I'm prompted to make one prefatory comment. Since the Eisenhower Foundation sees itself as the continuation of the Kerner commission, I'm reminded by the Kerner commission's insight into the fact that civilizations fall from within, that in the fourteenth century, the great Muslim historian Ibn Khaldoun made a similar observation in exploring the rise and fall of dynasties and civilizations in history.

He said that civilizations rise when leaders with a strong sense of social solidarity introduce sound principles, that lead to the prosperity of their group. And they fall when later generations, because of this very prosperity, become accustomed to luxuries, and see the role of leadership as handing out favors to their friends, rather than enforcing those sound policies that made the prosperity possible in the first place. And then civilization begins its inexorable decline.

Well, since I didn't know Father Geno, I'm in the awkward situation of discussing not the flesh-and-blood-person, or even channeling his spirit, but rather talking about a hypothetical Father Geno. Now I was assured that it was okay for me to bring up explosive subjects like Palestine and the war in Iraq. And I shall. But I want to first bring up an explosive subject you may not be expecting. And my only defense is I do it in the sense of constructive criticism. Perhaps I'm going to challenge some conventional wisdom that the admirers of Father Geno share.

We must begin with a question about whether Father Geno might have changed his views on some issues. After all, when we look at the cabal that has so much power these days, the neoconservative movement, it contains a lot of people who used to be liberals. That's why they're called the neoconservatives. They changed, and the time, the high water mark of this transformation was the time that Father Geno passed away, in the early 1980s.

Their motives for changing I won't get into, except to say that they saw a change in the American public, and they needed to change their position on certain issues in order to hold fast to those core issues that they were not willing to change on. What was the change that they saw? And how would Father Geno have addressed it?

First I have to say that I'm impressed from the biography Mr. O'Rourke has written of Father Geno's ability to look into the -- to look deep down. He would be confronted, trying to make coalitions with people who, by their rhetoric, could easily have been dismissed as racists or bigots. But Father Geno didn't do that. He dived underneath their rhetoric to see what was the legitimate complaint, and how could it be dealt with.

What I think we saw in the motion of the American public to the right in the 1980s was what I'll call the decline of socialism. Now, many people have a favorable view of

socialism because it symbolizes egalitarianism, it symbolizes equality, it symbolizes concern for the poor and the needy, it concerns an opposition to classism and opposition to imperialism. All of which are good things, but people forget the definition of socialism is government ownership of the means of production.

And that is an idea that is discredited. I won't dwell on this long except to quote from Anwar Ibrahim, former deputy prime minister of Malaysia who happened to be the guest last night at our Minaret of Freedom Institute annual dinner, who performed what was called the economic miracle of Malaysia in the 1990s. And who said that he was constantly confronted by opponents to his attempt to increase the productivity of Malaysia by employing free-market principles, by people who would say, "But what about the distribution of the wealth? You've got to be concerned about equitable distribution of the wealth."

And his response was, "Unless you have productivity, the most you can hope for is an equitable distribution of poverty."

I think that's what we saw in the American public. Of course, the American public never cared for socialism to start with, let's face that fact. But around the world there was a move away from it.<sup>0052</sup>

Now, if it was just a matter of a decline of socialism, I look at it as a good thing but I think there are other factors that we need to understand: the decline of liberalism, and the decline of conservatism.

Classical liberalism had a certain coherent philosophy that argued for the same good things that people admire about socialism, except did it with a respect for the importance of markets. In the 1930s, in America, we saw liberalism transform into modern liberalism as outlined in the book by John T. Flynn, the *Decline of American Liberalism*. It was essentially, people who held some of the old liberal values, but suddenly began to see big government as the means of implementing them. And big government was not part of classical liberalism.

I think we saw the same thing later in the decline of conservatism. Neoconservatism is not simply "neo" because a lot of former liberals have embraced it, but because it has rejected the small government principles of paleoconservatism. The neoconservatives are not Russell Kirk and Edmund Burke; the neoconservatives are Charles Krauthammer and George Will, who unabashedly favor a strong government. The fact that their purpose, that they would employ strong government for ends that we do not necessarily share, is beside the point.

Now, if we look at Father Geno, certainly while admitting that he may change his views on some issues, I think we have to acknowledge that there are some issues he would not change his views on. And I have identified three, and I am going to assume that he would stand fast by these, and that is: his concern for grassroots organization, his belief in coalition-building, and his concern for the most disadvantaged members of society.

Well, starting from that view, we'll address what I assume is the reason I was invited here: how can you create a coalition that would include the Muslims? Well, first you have to understand what the Muslim concerns are.

Before I get specifically to the Muslim concerns, let me give you a quote from a non-Muslim that I came across, a Rev. Dr. Robin Meyers, talking about public morality. He says, "When you start a war on false pretenses and then act as if your deceptions are justified because you are doing God's will and that your critics are either unpatriotic or lacking in faith, there are some of us who have given our lives to teaching and preaching the faith who believe that this is not only not moral, but immoral. When you live in a country that has established international rules for waging a just war, built the United Nations on your own soil to enforce them, and then arrogantly break the very rules you set down for the rest of the world, you are doing something immoral."

The issues that Muslims tend to be most strongly concerned with are social justice, anti-imperialism, and an economic view that is pro-market, but anti-corporatism.

Now, social justice is something that should resonate with admirers of Father Baroni. But the question is, for Muslims, social justice is implemented not necessarily through government action, but to a process of Zakat, obligatory charity, the recognition that part of your wealth belongs to those less fortunate. And the word, "Zakat," means to purify. And it's not necessarily that you did something impure in the acquisition of your wealth, because certainly that is forbidden by Islamic law. But rather, that the very fact that you have certain assets created by God in your possession means that you're denying them to others, and that therefore you've got to rectify the balance by helping those who for whatever reason don't have that share of the wealth. It is not a call for total equality, it's not a leveling process. The Zakat involves getting two and a half percent of your wealth to the poor and needy. That means you get to keep 97.5 percent. But it does mean that the very poorest don't have to suffer in the extremus that they would in the absence of that kind of a system.

It is anti-imperialist. And the reason for this I probably need not go into, it should be obvious. The Muslim world has been the receiving end of imperialism. Samuel Huntington, in his Clash of Civilizations, said the Muslim world has "bloody borders." It's true. What he didn't point out is that in almost all cases it is the Muslims who are the victims of the aggression.

And then, there is the Muslim view that is in favor of free markets, but against corporatism. Islam does not have the hostility towards wealth that's sometimes perceived in other religious traditions. The Prophet Mohammed was a merchant. The Prophet Mohammed, peace be upon him, said the honest businessman has a place in heaven, alongside the martyrs and the prophets. Of course he said "honest businessmen," which may exclude many people.

But Islam does not share the modern Western view that the corporation is a person, that a corporation has rights like people have rights. I think the problem with globalism is not that it involves world trade. I don't see anything wrong with the world trade, world trade is good. The problem with globalism is that it is setting up corporations as the masters of the world in world trade. It is putting them at the center of the stage, and making them the dominating force in society, rather than the nation-state, of which I'm no particular admirer, or neighborhoods, where I share with Father Baroni an admiration. Or even individuals, which Margaret Thatcher is so fond of, but which I don't think are promoted by these policies.

The three issues for coalition-building with Muslims are civil liberties, the war in Iraq, and the plight of Palestinians. Now, these are very important issues for Muslims, and they should be issues that are important for everyone who has the same concerns that Father Baroni had.

Civil liberties, especially the matter of freedom of religion, is very important in these days of the Patriot Act, when we see conspiracy laws used in order to indict people for playing paintball, because they had visions of going to fight against the Hindu occupation of Kashmir, as happened in Virginia nearby, where one man is doing 20 years; not for doing anything that would otherwise be illegal. But because he is in violation of conspiracy to violate the Neutrality Act.

The war in Iraq, built on deceptions, taking American tax money and pouring it down the destructive hole of war; one of the things that I think is important to understand about free markets is that they are win-win exchanges. War is a lose-lose exchange.

War is the only major activity conducted by governments in which everybody loses. And yet we go headlong into it, because of the agenda of a small group of people for whom it serves their purposes, but at the expense of the general American public, and the expense of the Iraqi public, certainly.

And at the expense of America's reputation in the Muslim world. And also among our allies. You know, if you haven't read Thucydides and The Peloponnesian Wars lately, go back and read them again. Athens, which we kind of looked back at as a wonderful, wonderful republic, as it turned into an empire, began to lose its friends, even its friends that it didn't do anything against, because those friends saw how it was turning against the weakest; making the weakest of its allies into its enemies, and saying, "Well, isn't it just a matter of time until they turn against us?"

And that's what we're seeing happen with America's status among its allies.

And finally, the plight of the Palestinians. Now, not only should Americans be in favor of the Palestinians' rights -- and here when I say this, I'm not calling for intervention in Palestine-Israel, anymore than I would call for intervention in Iraq. I'm talking about moral leadership. I'm talking about being an honest broker. I'm talking about speaking honestly, not saying Palestinians kill Israeli children, and neglect of that Israelis kill three times as many Palestinian children. I'm talking about fairness in our moral position; public morality.

Not only should we be in support of the Palestinians' cause because we are anti-apartheid and because we are pro-human rights, but also because we are pro-private property. The Israeli state has been confiscating the property of the Palestinians under a variety of excuses, whether it's national security, urban renewal, abandonment of the property because people left their home for -- in one case they went to an all-night wedding and showed up the next morning to find settlers and their houses saying, "you abandoned your property."

So this is an issue that we should be able to form coalitions with both the left and the right, except that the facts are not known, because there is no sense in public morality, it seems, that you have to tell the truth.

Now, if you want to look for an enemy, I would say rather than look for an enemy on the right or the left, let's look at development theory. Development theory, which has been embraced by both the pro-establishment right and the pro-establishment left, in their views have converged. I think once Father Geno later in his life began to have some doubts about the development movement, but I don't think he went far enough in his criticism of it. I'll read from Mr. O'Rourke's book.

"Baroni described himself as a liberal Democrat, but he believed that in some respects the Democratic Party had given the federal government more power and responsibility and it could handle. Baroni selectively saw the growth of federal power as dangerous and destructive. This in his view was especially the case with urban renewal, a forerunner to the urban development for which HUD was responsible. Father Baroni didn't want bulldozers in his ethnic urban neighborhoods."

Well, I think he was right about that but I think he needed to go further. Development theory sacrifices the rights of not only minorities, and neighborhoods, and individuals and everybody, for it is not commerce; it is not trade. It is artificial development. And if you give that kind of power into the hands of government, you can rest assured that it will be used for the benefit of the rich and powerful. It will not be used for the benefit of the poor and disenfranchised. And this is what we have seen repeatedly.

Now, final words on public morality. I really don't think there is a distinction between public morality and private morality. I believe, with Jefferson, that the same moral rules that apply to individuals when they are acting individually, apply to them when they're acting collectively. There is no right that I would give to a corporation or a government that I would not give to my neighbor, or myself.

The problem we face today is not that there's too much public morality, but that public morality is conceived as a morality which we are going to impose on other people, against their will. Instead, I think we should view public morality as the morality of those of us acting in public, whether we are government officials or whether we're grass-roots activists, that we should take our moral considerations seriously, and carry them with us. And above all of these, not to steal, you know, not to kill, not to show disrespect to our fellow human beings who are entitled to dignity; but above all, not to lie. To tell the truth, even though the truth might hurt. Thank you.