

CALL TO WORSHIP

“In the Name of God, a Fatwa against Salman Rushdie. In the Name of God, murder in the Balkans. In the Name of God, the bombing of the World Trade Center in New York. In the Name of God, the Siege at Waco, Texas. In the Name of God, Hindus and Muslims kill each other in India. In the Name of God, bloody warfare between Protestants and Catholics in Ireland. In the Name of God, Shiites and Sunnis are at each other’s throats in Iraq and Iran, as are Arabs and Jews in the Middle East. In the name of God, a doctor is murdered because he believed in a woman’s right to choose. *In the name of God, what is going on?*”

These are the words of Shirley MacLaine, making an impassioned plea to the American Society of Newspaper Editors to give attention to spirituality and religion as something other than a great news angle when violence erupts. The truly disturbing fact about her speech is the date: 1993. The reference to the World Trade Center bombing is to the first time that happened. Not much has changed in sixteen years.

People continue to invoke the name of God when they are caught up in the frenzy of something that seems all-important and they are casting about for the most powerful, high-voltage word they can summon. Like the Catholic Cardinal who reached for the words “enemies of God” to describe the doctors who turned off the life support systems maintaining the comatose body of Terry Schiavo a few years ago.

God has been maligned, misused, we might even say murdered, figuratively, by people inside and outside of religion. Some folks think it would be better to leave off talking about God altogether. Can any good come of it? Is there really anything new left to say? We convene this morning to see whether, in the name of God, there is. We have begun by taking a page from Shakespeare, who famously said, “the play’s the thing wherein we’ll catch the conscience of the king.” And, we hope, the consciences of everyone, by the time the playwrights, poets and preachers of prose have had their say. So let us live in the questions again today. Come, let us worship together.