

THE PROGRESSIVE FORUM

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For Release

Great Minds, Great Answers

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Brian Greene, Karen Armstrong, James Hansen, Fall Season 2009

Leading theoretical physicist Brian Greene September 29, religion scholar Karen Armstrong October 8, and premier climatologist James Hansen of NASA October 29 form an exciting and diverse fall season at The Progressive Forum 2009. All events are at the Wortham Center, Cullen Theater, at 7:30 PM. Tickets range from \$14 through \$54. A limited number of \$74 tickets are available which include a pre-event reception with the speakers, a complementary signed book for the Greene and Armstrong event, and center-front seating. All speakers will greet fans or sign books at the end of the evening. Tickets are available at www.progressiveforumhouston.org. There is no physical box office except at the theater on event night.

Randall Morton, Progressive Forum president, said, "This is a season for seekers. Brian Greene is about ultimate answers on the inner workings of the universe. Karen Armstrong is about ultimate answers of the inner self. And James Hansen of NASA provides answers on the most pressing issue of our time, climate change, just prior to the Copenhagen Climate Conference in December."

Brian Greene is the author of *The Elegant Universe: Superstrings, Hidden Dimensions, and the Quest for the Ultimate Theory* (2003) which was a Pulitzer finalist and was turned into an Emmy winning PBS *Nova* series which he hosted. Greene's wit and humor have been on

-More-

Page 2

display as guests of David Letterman, Charlie Rose, and Stephen Colbert. *The Washington Post* called him the “single best explainer of abstruse ideas in the world today.”

Greene is a theoretical physicist who has made groundbreaking discoveries in string theory. For nearly 20 years, he’s been working on quantum gravity and unified theories. He’s professor of physics and mathematics at Columbia University.

A leader in connecting people to the joys of science, Greene’s presentation on a big screen is renowned for its inspiration. Greene founded the annual World Science Festival in New York City attended by 120,000 people a year. He’s also author of *Fabric of the Cosmos: Space, Time, and the Texture of the Universe* (2005).

The Greene event also celebrates the 400 year anniversary of the moment when Galileo turned his self-made telescope on the night sky in November 1609. The event is sponsored by Berg & Androphy.

Karen Armstrong, one of the world’s leading commentators on religious affairs, will discuss her latest book, *The Case for God* (Alfred A. Knopf), in which she moves from the Paleolithic age to the present, detailing the great lengths to which humanity has gone to experience a sacred reality, with a focus on the kind of faith that speaks to our polarized modern times. She will sign books and greet fans at the end of the evening. Books will be on sale at the event by Brazos Bookstore. The Progressive Forum is producing this event in association with Brazos Bookstore.

Dr. Jill Carroll will introduce Karen Armstrong. Dr. Carroll is a top religious scholar and formerly executive director of the Boniuk Center For The Study and Advancement of Religious Tolerance at Rice University. Her book, *A Dialogue Of Civilizations*, was a *Publisher’s Weekly* bestseller in religion. Dr. Carroll has been

-More-

interviewed by *The New York Times*, PBS, and *Good Morning America*.

The Boniuk Center for the Study and Advancement of Religious Tolerance at Rice University is the event's exclusive financial sponsor. Dr. Shira Lander, Boniuk interim director, said, "Karen Armstrong is a world-renowned observer of religion and a leading voice in promoting inter-religious understanding and compassion, values we share."

Karen Armstrong is a best-selling author whose books have been translated into forty-five languages. A British author living in London, Armstrong first gained prominence with her highly successful *A History Of God: The 4,000-Year Quest of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (1993).

She has been called "arguably the most lucid, wide ranging and consistently interesting religion writer today" by *Salon.com*. Since the attacks on September 11, 2001, Armstrong has become a widely sought-after authority on Islam and fundamentalism. She has addressed members of the U.S. Congress, participated in the World Economic Forum in Davos, and spoken at the United Nations. She has addressed the NATO Naval Defense College in Rome and the Council for Foreign Relations. She advised members of the Dutch Parliament about Islam and the integration of communities.

In 2007, she was awarded a medal for Arts and Sciences by the Egyptian government for her services to Islam, the first foreigner to receive this decoration. She was invited by the Malaysian government to speak in Kuala Lumpur even though her books are banned there.

In 2008, she received a TED Conference prize and is working with the organization to propagate a Charter of Compassion to be signed by a thousand religious

-More-

leaders by 2009 to help restore the Golden Rule as central to religious practice and daily life throughout the world. The Charter is being created online with input from the general public and leading thinkers in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

Her other books include: *Through the Narrow Gate* (1981) (1991); *Jerusalem: One City, Three Faiths* (1996); *The Battle for God, A History of Fundamentalism* (2000); *Islam, A Short History* (2000); *Buddha* (2001); *The Spiral Staircase: A Memoir* (2004); *A Short History of Myth* (2005); *The Great Transformation: The Beginning of Our Religious Traditions* (2006); *Muhammad: A Prophet for our Time* (2006); and *The Bible: A Biography* (2007).

She is also the author of three television documentaries and took part in Bill Moyers' television series on PBS called *Genesis*.

Armstrong spent seven years as a Roman Catholic nun in the 1960s, but left in 1969 which she writes about in *Through the Narrow Gate* and *The Spiral Staircase*. She studied English literature at Oxford University, earning the degrees of B.A. and M.Litt. She became a teacher, but since 1982, she has devoted her life to writing, lecturing, and broadcasting on religious affairs. She says she has become a "freelance monotheist."

She also has said, "I say that religion isn't about believing things. It's about what you do. It's ethical alchemy. It's about behaving in a way that changes you, that gives you intimations of holiness and sacredness."

James Hansen is head of the Goddard Institute for Space Studies of NASA in New York City and an adjunct professor of geology at Columbia University. He was the first to create broad awareness of global warming in his Congressional testimonies in the 1980s.

-More-

His most recent research indicates that the climate is even more sensitive than previously thought, that the safe level of atmospheric CO₂ is 350 ppm (parts per million) and must be returned to below that level over time. The current CO₂ concentration is at 387 ppm and is rising steadily.

Dr. Hansen says the climate is nearing tipping points “that would be irreversible if we do not promptly slow fossil emission....”

His early research on the properties of the clouds of Venus led to their identification as sulfuric acid. Since the late 1970s, Dr. Hansen has worked on studies of the Earth’s climate. He was elected to the National Academy of Sciences in 1995.

The Progressive Forum is a nonpartisan, nonprofit 501(C)(3) civic speaker organization presenting seven events a year at The Wortham Center. It’s the only civic speaker organization in the nation dedicated expressly to progressive values. Its purpose is to enrich our democracy and culture by striving to present the greatest minds from all the fields of human endeavor, the sciences and the humanities as well as politics and public affairs, great minds it believes are advancing the success of individuals, our species, and life on the earth.

This year of 2009 marks the fourth year of The Progressive Forum. Past speakers include Al Gore who launched *An Inconvenient Truth* at The Progressive Forum, his first U.S. book event for that title. Others have included Robert F. Kennedy, Jr. Jared Diamond, Seymour Hersh, Molly Ivins, George Soros, Edward O. Wilson, Frank Rich, Garrison Keillor, Joe Klein, Tim Flannery, Anna Deavere Smith, Gloria Steinem, James Hansen, Ken Burns, George Lakoff, Robert Redford, Bill

-More-

McKibben, Elizabeth Edwards, Larry Wilmore, T. Boone Pickens, Lester Brown, Nancy Pelosi, and Brian Greene (September 29, 2009).

All Progressive Forum events are carbon neutral through a donation from DrivingGreen.com which offsets 51 tons of greenhouse gasses per event including the speaker's air and ground transportation, venue air conditioning and power, and audience driving to and from the theater.

The Progressive Forum originated a new model in civic speaker organizations in Houston to deliver a higher quality audience experience in a theater rather than a hotel luncheon, as well as generate a much larger audience than traditional speaking events. The Progressive Forum operates as a performing arts company by using the finest theaters, paying speaker fees to top intellectual stars, and marketing throughout the region. It offers convenient box office services through its website allowing ticket buyers to print tickets at their computer, in addition to traditional phone sales.

The Progressive Forum premiered on June 13, 2005, with Robert F. Kennedy, Jr. and Houston Mayor Bill White in a program called "Our Environmental Challenges." Founder and president, Randall R. Morton has owned Randall Morton International, Inc. for 34 years, an advertising and public relations agency whose clients have included leading oil equipment companies in the U.S., Japan, Mexico, and Europe. Morton created, produced, and hosted the Oilfield Breakfast Forum from 1994 to 2003, a speaker platform which is still the largest in the oil industry today. While earning a degree in government from Georgetown University in Washington, D.C., he served as an issue writer for the Democratic National Committee.