Fifteenth Annual Victor Danner Memorial Lecture

April 14, 2017 at 7:30pm
University Club - President’s Room
Indiana Memorial Union

SHARI’AH LAW: REASONING WITH GOD AND THE CHALLENGE OF THE UNREASONABLE

Presented by:
Professor Khaled Abou El Fadl
University of California, Los Angeles School of Law

Opening Remarks by:
Professor Asma Afsaruddin
Professor of NELC

Co-sponsored by Horizons of Knowledge, Islamic Studies, the Center for the Study of the Middle East (CSME), the College Arts & Humanities Institute (CAHI), Philosophy, Religious Studies, the McKinney Family Foundation, and Friends of the Danner Family and former students
Dr. Khaled Abou El Fadl is one of the world's leading authorities on Islamic law, Shari'ah and Islam, and a prominent scholar in the field of human rights. He is the Omar and Azmeralda Alfi Professor in Islamic Law at the UCLA School of Law where he teaches International Human Rights, Islamic Jurisprudence, National Security Law, Law and Terrorism, Islam and Human Rights, Political Asylum and Political Crimes and Legal Systems. He is also the Deputy Chair of the Islamic Studies Interdepartmental Program at UCLA.

Among his many honors and distinctions, Dr. Abou El Fadl was awarded the University of Oslo Human Rights Award, the Leo and Lisl Eitinger Prize in 2007, and named a Carnegie Scholar in Islamic Law in 2005. He was previously appointed by President George W. Bush to serve on the U.S. Commission for International Religious Freedom, and also served as a member of the board of directors of Human Rights Watch. In 2005, he was listed as one of LawDragon's Top 500 Lawyers in the Nation. In 2013, he was recognized among “The 50 Smartest People of Faith” by TheBestSchools.org, and was awarded the “American Muslim Achievement Award” in 2014. In 2016, he was named one of the World’s 500 Most Influential Muslims, and has also been ranked among “The Power 500 List of the World’s Most Influential Arabs (2011, 2012).”

Dr. Abou El Fadl is most noted for his scholarly approach to Islam from a moral point of view. He writes extensively on universal themes of humanity, morality, human rights, justice, and mercy, and is well known for his writings on beauty as a core moral value of Islam. He is one of the foremost critics of puritan and Wahhabi Islam. Dr. Abou El Fadl has appeared on most major national and international media channels, and has published widely in such publications as the New York Times, Washington Post, Wall Street Journal, Los Angeles Times, Al-Jazeera English, Huffington Post, Boston Review and many others.

Dr. Abou El Fadl holds a B.A. in Political Science from Yale University, a J.D. from the University of Pennsylvania Law School, and an M.A. and Ph.D. in Islamic law from Princeton University. Dr. Abou El Fadl is also an Islamic jurist and scholar, having received 13 years of systematic instruction in Islamic jurisprudence, grammar and eloquence in Egypt and Kuwait. His latest book is entitled, Reasoning with God: Reclaiming Shari’ah in the Modern Age, considered to be his magnum opus and intellectual autobiography, from which he will make his remarks in tonight's lecture.
Professor Victor Danner was born on October 22, 1926, in Irapuato, Guanajuato, Mexico to Arthur James and Maria Lopez Danner. As a young man, he served his country during WWII. After the war he attended Georgetown University where he received his B.A. magna cum laude in 1957. Later that year he traveled to Morocco to become an instructor and eventually Director of the American Language Center, sponsored by the US Information Service. While there he took advantage of the opportunity not only to get acquainted with the country but also to perfect his knowledge of classical Arabic texts.

In 1964, Professor Danner returned to the US for his doctoral studies and graduated from Harvard in 1970. He came to IU in 1967 and was a professor of Arabic and Religious Studies at Indiana University until his death in 1990. He served as Chairman of the Near Eastern Languages and Cultures Department for five years, and was an enthusiastic supporter of the Middle Eastern Studies Program.

He was an internationally renowned scholar in the fields of Islamic mysticism, comparative religion, and classical Arabic literature. In 1976, he was invited to speak at the international World Festival of Islam in London. Professor Danner was also active in a number of professional organizations, including the Washington D.C.-based Foundation for Traditional Studies, for which he served as Secretary-Treasurer. He wrote Ibn ‘Ata ‘Allah’s Sufi Aphorisms (1973); Ibn ‘Ata ‘Allah: The Book of Wisdom, (1978); and The Islamic Tradition: An Introduction (1988), in addition to over twenty-five articles and reviews.

One of his students, Lauri King Irani, captured his essence: “As a teacher, Victor Danner had few equals. He taught Arabic, classical Arabic literature, Islam, Sufism, the Qur’an, comparative religion, comparative mysticism, and Eastern religions. His dignified bearing, elegant gestures, and verbal eloquence transformed his lectures into performances which had the power to captivate and inspire his students, whether he was discussing Arabic grammar or Islamic theology. His concern for and encouragement of his students, coupled with his understated sense of humor, earned him a well-deserved reputation as a caring and committed educator who taught not only when behind the classroom lectern, but also by example.”

He who is illumined at the beginning is illumined at the end.
-from the Sufi Aphorisms by Ibn ‘Ata ‘Allah (d. 1309)
Translated by Victor Danner
We would like to offer our sincere thanks to the generous people who have already contributed to the Victor Danner Memorial fund, especially Dr. Mary Ann Fadae Danner.

Contributions to the Victor Danner Fund can be made at:

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Thank you!

Stephen Katz  
NELC Chair & Professor